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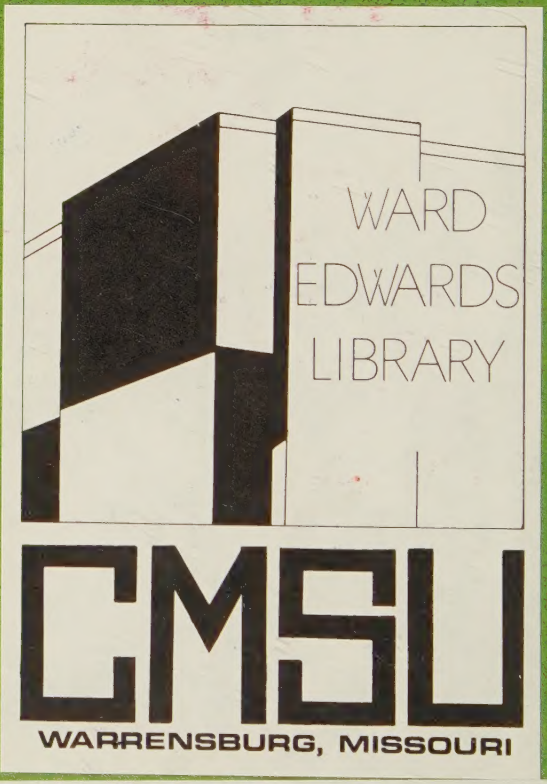

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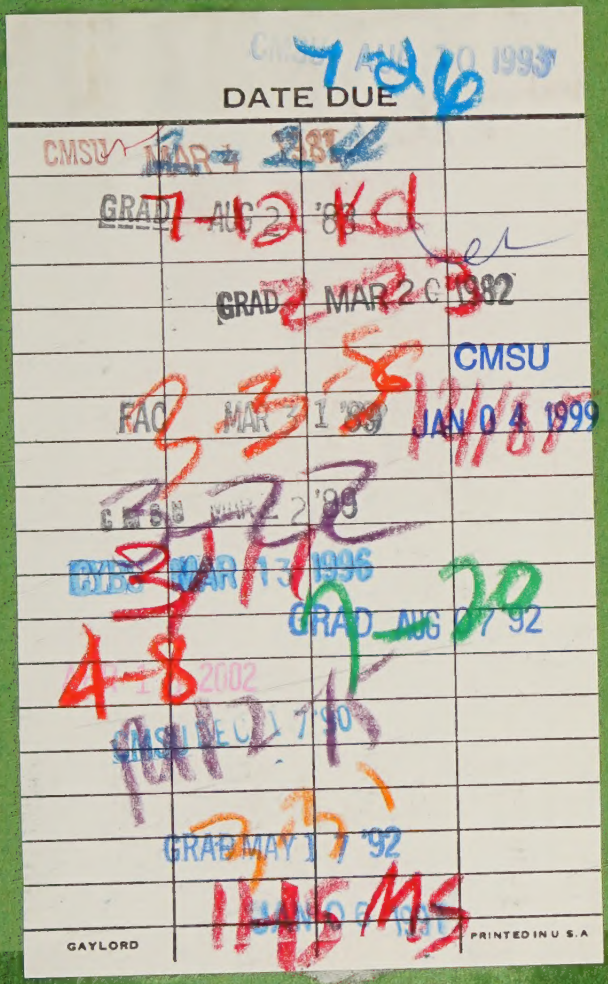
Matthew Arnold & his poetry

Bickley, Francis Lawrance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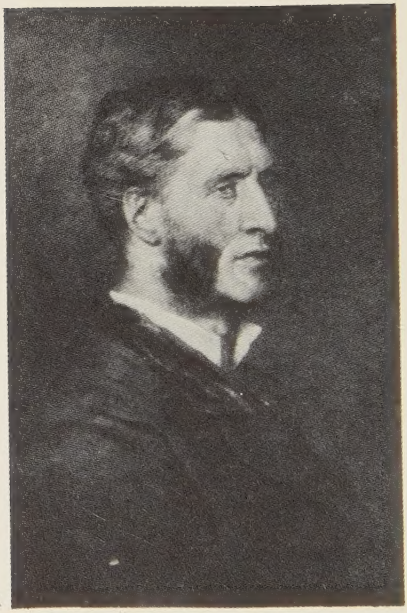

Photo F. Hollyer.

Matthew Arnold
G. F. Watts

MATTHEW ARNOLD & HIS POETRY

BY

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GENERAL PREFACE

A GLANCE through the pages of this little book will suffice to disclose the general plan of the series of which it forms a part. Only a few words of explanation, therefore, will be necessary.

The point of departure is the undeniable fact that with the vast majority of young students of literature a living interest in the work of any poet can best be aroused, and an intelligent appreciation of it secured, when it is immediately associated with the character and career of the poet himself. The cases are indeed few and far between in which much fresh light will not be thrown upon a poem by some knowledge of the personality of the writer, while it will often be found that the most direct—perhaps even the only—way to the heart of its meaning lies through a consideration of the circumstances in which it had its birth. The purely æsthetic critic may possibly object that a poem should be regarded simply as a self-contained and detached piece of art, having no personal affiliations or bearings. Of the validity of this as an abstract principle nothing need now be said. The fact remains that, in the earlier stages of study at any rate, poetry is most valued and loved when it is made to seem most human and vital ; and the human and vital interest of poetry can be most surely brought home to the reader by the biographical method of interpretation.

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This is to some extent recognised by writers of histories and text-books of literature, and by editors of selections from the works of our poets ; for place is always given by them to a certain amount of biographical material. But in the histories and text-books the biography of a given writer stands by itself, and his work has to be sought elsewhere, the student being left to make the connection for himself ; while even in our current editions of selections there is little systematic attempt to link biography, step by step, with production.

This brings us at once to the chief purpose of the present series. In this, biography and production will be considered together and in intimate association. In other words, an endeavour will be made to interest the reader in the lives and personalities of the poets dealt with, and at the same time to use biography as an introduction and key to their writings.

Each volume will therefore contain the life-story of the poet who forms its subject. In this, attention will be specially directed to his personality as it expressed itself in his poetry, and to the influences and conditions which counted most as formative factors in the growth of his genius. This biographical study will be used as a setting for a selection, as large as space will permit, of his representative poems. Such poems, where possible, will be reproduced in full, and care will be taken to bring out their connection with his character, his circumstances, and the movement of his mind. Then, in

addition, so much more general literary criticism will be incorporated as may seem to be needed to supplement the biographical material, and to exhibit both the essential qualities and the historical importance of his work.

It is believed that the plan thus pursued is substantially in the nature of a new departure, and that the volumes of this series, constituting as they will an introduction to the study of some of our greatest poets, will be found useful to teachers and students of literature, and no less to the general lover of English poetry.

WILLIAM HENRY HUDSON

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MATTHEW ARNOLD AND HIS POETRY

EDUCATIONALIST and celebrant of England's river as he was destined to become, it seems apt that Matthew Arnold should have been born at Laleham in the Thames valley, the eldest son of Arnold of Rugby. On Christmas Eve 1822, however, when the third of the Victorian poets came into the world, Thomas Arnold had not yet been appointed to the headmastership which was to bring so much honour to himself and so much profit to the school he ruled. He was still teaching private pupils in the quiet riverside village where two years previously he had brought his wife, Mary Penrose, the clever woman whose sympathy with her brilliant son was so close, enduring and, one may conjecture, inspiring.

Doctor Arnold went to Rugby in 1828, when Matthew was five, but two years later the little boy returned to Laleham, where he remained at the house of his uncle, the Rev. John Buckland, until he was sent to Winchester in 1836. A loyal Wykehamist, Dr. Arnold wished his son to come in contact with the traditions of the great school. In the following year, however, he altered his intentions and brought Matthew to Rugby, where the rest of his school-days was spent.

Thus, in the school-house at Rugby or in the holiday home near Grasmere—Wordsworth's country—Matthew Arnold grew up under the eye of his father. Temperamentally the two were poles asunder—Thomas stern, puritanical, utterly lacking in the sense of humour ; Matthew gay, sceptical, not guiltless of flippancy. Yet a deep affection seems to have subsisted between them, and the poet always held the memory of his father, whom he lost before he was twenty, in the greatest reverence. In later life he might, for the sake of argument, suggest, in his airy way, that " Dear Doctor Arnold was not infallible " ; but his references to " Papa " in his letters to his mother and sisters are always in a spirit of devotion, and it gave him genuine pleasure to hear that the names of Thomas and Matthew Arnold had been coupled as equivalents. In his poem " Rugby Chapel," written in November 1857, he paid a pious and noble tribute to the great headmaster, who had died fifteen years before :

> Fifteen years have gone round
> Since thou arosest to tread,
> In the summer-morning, the road
> Of death, at a call unforeseen,
> Sudden. For fifteen years,
> We who till then in thy shade
> Rested as under the boughs
> Of a mighty oak, have endured
> Sunshine and rain as we might,
> Bare, unshaded, alone,
> Lacking the shelter of thee.

Of the sincerity of this, or of the eulogy which it preludes, there can be no doubt. Matthew Arnold's relations with his family were, indeed, strikingly harmonious and happy. The sympathy between him and his mother has already been referred to. With his eldest sister, the wife of W. E. Forster, author of the Endowed Schools Bill, his friendship was as deep. Of his published letters, those to "K.," as he always called her, are among the most intimate. "Perhaps," he wrote in 1861, she "has even now the first place in my heart as the judge of my poems." Higher tribute than that could no poet offer. The chances of life, perhaps, made it more difficult for him to keep in close touch with his brothers, but when William Delafield Arnold died at Gibraltar on his way home from India in 1859, he mourned him both in "Stanzas from Carnac" and in "A Southern Night."

In 1841 Matthew Arnold went up to Oxford as a scholar of Balliol College. Of his actual life at the University we know very little. His published letters, almost our only source of information, do not begin until some years after he had come down. But the influence of Oxford was abiding, making itself felt everywhere in his work. Much of his writing may fairly be described as academic, though no flavour of disparagement need cling to the word. Arnold himself was ever ready to acknowledge this influence; and his sense of all that he owed to Oxford found expression in words which, often as they have been quoted, should never want

their place in any selection of his poetry. For if, just now and then, that poetry fell dangerously near the level of prose, here for once his prose, permeated and made rhythmical with a fine emotion, becomes that rarest form of art, a prose poem.

> Beautiful city! So venerable, so lovely, so unravaged by the fierce intellectual life of our century, so serene!
>
> There are our young barbarians, all at play!
>
> And yet, steeped in sentiment as she lies, spreading her gardens to the moonlight, and whispering from her towers the last enchantment of the Middle Age, who will deny that Oxford, by her ineffable charm, keeps ever calling us nearer to the true goal of all of us, to the ideal, to perfection,—to beauty, in a word, which is only truth seen from another side?—nearer, perhaps, than all the science of Tübingen. Adorable dreamer, whose heart has been so romantic! who hast given thyself so prodigally, given thyself to sides and to heroes not mine, only never to the Philistines! home of lost causes, and forsaken beliefs, and unpopular names, and impossible loyalties!

This is the most eloquent tribute that Arnold, or perhaps any one else, ever paid to Oxford herself. But Oxford friendships and that beautiful countryside which means so much to some Oxford men—and the river, which was almost literally "Father" Thames to him—he commemorated in two of his loveliest poems—two poems which, though many years separated their production, he wished should always be read as parts of a whole. The first of these

poems, "The Scholar Gipsy," was suggested by a story in the "Vanity of Dogmatising" by Joseph Glanvil, a seventeenth-century moralist, of a young man who was forced by poverty to leave the University and so joined "a company of vagabond gipsies."

THE SCHOLAR GIPSY

Go, for they call you, Shepherd, from the hill ;
Go, Shepherd, and untie the wattled cotes :
No longer leave thy wistful flock unfed,
Nor let thy bawling fellows rack their throats,
Nor the cropp'd grasses shoot another head.
But when the fields are still,
And the tired men and dogs all gone to rest,
And only the white sheep are sometimes seen
Cross and recross the strips of moon-blanch'd green ;
Come, Shepherd, and again renew the quest.

Here, where the reaper was at work of late,
In this high field's dark corner, where he leaves
His coat, his basket, and his earthen cruse,
And in the sun all morning binds the sheaves,
Then here, at noon, comes back his stores to use ;
Here will I sit and wait,
While to my ear from uplands far away
The bleating of the folded flocks is borne ;
With distant cries of reapers in the corn—
All the live murmur of a summer's day.

Screen'd is this nook o'er the high, half-reap'd field,
And here till sun-down, Shepherd, will I be.
Through the thick corn the scarlet poppies peep
And round green roots and yellowing stalks I see

Pale blue convolvulus in tendrils creep :
And air-swept lindens yield
Their scent, and rustle down their perfumed showers
Of bloom on the bent grass where I am laid,
And bower me from the August sun with shade ;
And the eye travels down to Oxford's towers :

And near me on the grass lies Glanvil's book—
Come, let me read the oft-read tale again,
The story of that Oxford scholar poor
Of pregnant parts and quick inventive brain,
Who, tired of knocking at Preferment's door,
One summer morn forsook
His friends, and went to learn the Gipsy lore,
And roam'd the world with that wild brotherhood,
And came, as most men deem'd, to little good,
But came to Oxford and his friends no more.

But once, years after, in the country lanes,
Two scholars whom at college erst he knew
Met him, and of his way of life enquired.
Whereat he answer'd, that the Gipsy crew,
His mates, had arts to rule as they desired
The workings of men's brains ;
And they can bind them to what thoughts they will :
" And I," he said, " the secret of their art,
When fully learn'd, will to the world impart :
But it needs happy moments for this skill."

This said, he left them, and return'd no more,
But rumours hung about the country side
That the lost Scholar long was seen to stray,
Seen by rare glimpses, pensive and tongue-tied
In hat of antique shape, and cloak of grey,
The same the Gipsies wore.

Shepherds had met him on the Hurst in spring :
At some lone alehouse in the Berkshire moors,
On the warm ingle bench, the smock-frock'd boors
Had found him seated at their entering.

But, mid their drink and clatter, he would fly :
And I myself seem half to know thy looks,
And put the shepherds, Wanderer, on thy trace ;
And boys who in lone wheatfields scare the rooks
I ask if thou hast pass'd their quiet place ;
Or in my boat I lie
Moor'd to the cool bank in the summer heats,
Mid wide grass meadows which the sunshine fills,
And watch the warm green-muffled Cumner hills,
And wonder if thou haunt'st their shy retreats.

For most, I know, thou lov'st retired ground.
Thee, at the ferry, Oxford riders blithe,
Returning home on summer nights, have met
Crossing the stripling Thames at Bab-lock-hithe,
Trailing in the cool stream thy fingers wet,
As the slow punt swings round :
And leaning backwards in a pensive dream,
And fostering in thy lap a heap of flowers
Pluck'd in shy fields and distant woodland bowers,
And thine eyes resting on the moonlit stream.

And then they land, and thou art seen no more.
Maidens who from the distant hamlets come
To dance around the Fyfield elm in May,
Oft through the darkening fields have seen thee roam,
Or cross a stile into the public way.
Oft thou hast given them store
Of flowers—the frail-leaf'd, white anemone—

Dark bluebells drench'd with dews of summer eves—
And purple orchises with spotted leaves—
But none has words she can report of thee.

And, above Godstow Bridge, when hay-time's here
In June, and many a scythe in sunshine flames,
Men who through those wide fields of breezy grass
Where black-wing'd swallows haunt the glittering Thames,
To bathe in the abandon'd lasher pass,
Have often pass'd thee near
Sitting upon the river bank o'ergrown :
Mark'd thy outlandish garb, thy figure spare,
Thy dark vague eyes, and soft abstracted air ;
But, when they came from bathing, thou wert gone.

At some lone homestead in the Cumner hills,
Where at her open door the housewife darns,
Thou hast been seen, or hanging on a gate
To watch the threshers in the mossy barns.
Children, who early range these slopes and late
For cresses from the rills,
Have known thee watching, all an April day,
The springing pastures and the feeding kine ;
And mark'd thee, when the stars come out and shine,
Through the long dewy grass move slow away.

In Autumn, on the skirts of Bagley wood,
Where most the Gipsies by the turf-edged way
Pitch their smoked tents, and every bush you see
With scarlet patches tagg'd and shreds of grey,
Above the forest ground call'd Thessaly—
The blackbird picking food

Sees thee, nor stops his meal, nor fears at all ;
So often has he known thee past him stray
Rapt, twirling in thy hand a wither'd spray,
And waiting for the spark from Heaven to fall.

And once, in winter, on the causeway chill
Where home through flooded fields foot-travellers go,
Have I not pass'd thee on the wooden bridge
Wrapt in thy cloak and battling with the snow,
Thy face towards Hinksey and its wintry ridge ?
And thou hast climb'd the hill
And gain'd the white brow of the Cumner range,
Turn'd once to watch, while thick the snowflakes fall,
The line of festal light in Christ-Church hall—
Then sought thy straw in some sequester'd grange.

But what—I dream ! Two hundred years are flown
Since first thy story ran through Oxford halls,
And the grave Glanvil did the tale inscribe
That thou wert wander'd from the studious walls
To learn strange arts, and join a Gipsy tribe :
And thou from earth art gone
Long since, and in some quiet churchyard laid ;
Some country nook, where o'er thy unknown grave
Tall grasses and white flowering nettles wave—
Under a dark red-fruited yew-tree's shade.

—No, no, thou hast not felt the lapse of hours.
For what wears out the life of mortal men ?
'Tis that from change to change their being rolls :
'Tis that repeated shocks, again, again,

Exhaust the energy of strongest souls,
And numb the elastic powers.
Till having used our nerves with bliss and teen,
And tired upon a thousand schemes our wit,
To the just-pausing Genius we remit
Our worn-out life, and are—what we have been.

Thou hast not lived, why should'st thou perish, so ?
Thou hadst *one* aim, *one* business, *one* desire :
Else wert thou long since number'd with the dead—
Else hadst thou spent, like other men, thy fire.
The generations of thy peers are fled,
And we ourselves shall go ;
But thou possessest an immortal lot,
And we imagine thee exempt from age
And living as thou liv'st on Glanvil's page,
Because thou hadst—what we, alas, have not.

For early didst thou leave the world, with powers
Fresh, undiverted to the world without,
Firm to their mark, not spent on other things ;
Free from the sick fatigue, the languid doubt,
Which much to have tried, in much been baffled, brings.
O Life unlike to ours !
Who fluctuate idly without term or scope,
Of whom each strives, nor knows for what he strives,
And each half lives a hundred different lives ;
Who wait like thee, but not, like thee, in hope.

Thou waitest for the spark from Heaven : and we,
Light half-believers of our casual creeds,

Who never deeply felt, nor clearly will'd,
Whose insight never has borne fruit in deeds,
Whose vague resolves never have been fulfill'd ;
For whom each year we see
Breeds new beginnings, disappointments new ;
Who hesitate and falter life away,
And lose to-morrow the ground won to-day—
Ah, do not we, Wanderer, await it too ?

Yes, we await it, but it still delays,
And then we suffer ; and amongst us One,
Who most has suffer'd, takes dejectedly
His seat upon the intellectual throne ;
And all his store of sad experience he
Lays bare of wretched days ;
Tells us his misery's birth and growth and signs,
And how the dying spark of hope was fed,
And how the breast was sooth'd, and how the head,
And all his hourly varied anodynes.

This for our wisest : and we others pine,
And wish the long unhappy dream would end,
And waive all claim to bliss, and try to bear
With close-lipp'd Patience for our only friend,
Sad Patience, too near neighbour to Despair :
But none has hope like thine.
Thou through the fields and through the woods dost stray,
Roaming the country side, a truant boy,
Nursing thy project in unclouded joy,
And every doubt long blown by time away.

O born in days when wits were fresh and clear,
And life ran gaily as the sparkling Thames ;

Before this strange disease of modern life,
With its sick hurry, its divided aims,
Its heads o'ertax'd, its palsied hearts, was rife—
Fly hence, our contact fear!
Still fly, plunge deeper in the bowering wood!
Averse, as Dido did with gesture stern
From her false friend's approach in Hades turn,
Wave us away, and keep thy solitude.

Still nursing the unconquerable hope,
Still clutching the inviolable shade,
With a free onward impulse brushing through,
By night, the silver'd branches of the glade—
Far on the forest skirts, where none pursue
On some mild pastoral slope
Emerge, and resting on the moonlit pales,
Freshen thy flowers, as in former years,
With dew, or listen with enchanted ears,
From the dark dingles, to the nightingales.

But fly our paths, our feverish contact fly!
For strong the infection of our mental strife,
Which, though it gives no bliss, yet spoils for rest;
And we should win thee from thy own fair life,
Like us distracted, and like us unblest.
Soon, soon thy cheer would die,
Thy hopes grow timorous, and unfix'd thy powers,
And thy clear aims be cross and shifting made:
And then thy glad perennial youth would fade,
Fade, and grow old at last and die like ours.

Then fly our greetings, fly our speech and smiles!
—As some grave Tyrian trader, from the sea,
Descried at sunrise an emerging prow
Lifting the cool-hair'd creepers stealthily

The fringes of a southward-facing brow
Among the Ægean isles :
And saw the merry Grecian coaster come,
Freighted with amber grapes, and Chian wine,
Green bursting figs, and tunnies steep'd in brine ;
And knew the intruders on his ancient home,

The young light-hearted Masters of the waves ;
And snatch'd his rudder, and shook out more sail,
And day and night held on indignantly
O'er the blue Midland waters with the gale,
Betwixt the Syrtes and soft Sicily,
To where the Atlantic raves
Outside the Western Straits, and unbent sails
There, where down cloudy cliffs, through sheets of foam,
Shy traffickers, the dark Iberians come ;
And on the beach undid his corded bales.

The "Scholar Gipsy" was first published in the "Poems" of 1853. "Thyrsis," its companion, an elegy on Arnold's friend Arthur Hugh Clough, who died in 1861, did not appear until four years after the event it commemorated. Arnold had been two years writing it. The diction, modelled on that of Theocritus, was, he says, intended "to be so artless as to be almost heedless." "Heedless" seems a poor epithet to apply to this exquisite language, but "Thyrsis" has a quality of Sicilian grace and simplicity which is not quite paralleled by anything in English literature except the poem as a sequel to which it was written. "Lycidas," that incomparable masterpiece, is grander ;

"Adonais" soars, in its great moments, to etherial heights which neither Milton nor Arnold ever knew; but among English elegies, those two and Swinburne's sombre, exotic lament for Baudelaire, "Ave atque Vale," are the only peers of "Thyrsis."

THYRSIS

A MONODY

To commemorate the Author's friend, Arthur Hugh Clough, who died at Florence, 1861

How changed is here each spot man makes or fills!
In the two Hinkseys nothing keeps the same;
The village-street its haunted mansion lacks,
And from the sign is gone Sibylla's name,
And from the roofs the twisted chimney-stacks.
Are ye too changed, ye hills?
See, 'tis no foot of unfamiliar men
To-night from Oxford up your pathway strays!
Here came I often, often, in old days;
Thyrsis and I; we still had Thyrsis then.

Runs it not here, the track by Childsworth Farm,
Up past the wood, to where the elm-tree crowns
The hill behind whose ridge the sunset flames?
The Signal-Elm, that looks on Ilsley Downs,
The Vale, the three lone wears, the youthful Thames?—
This winter-eve is warm,
Humid the air; leafless, yet soft as spring,
The tender purple spray on copse and briers;
And that sweet City with her dreaming spires
She needs not June for beauty's heightening,

Lovely all times she lies, lovely to-night.
Only, methinks, some loss of habit's power
Befalls me wandering through this upland dim.
Once pass'd I blindfold here, at any hour,
Now seldom come I, since I came with him.
That single elm-tree bright
Against the west—I miss it ! is it gone ?
We prized it dearly ; while it stood, we said,
Our friend, the Scholar-Gipsy, was not dead ;
While the tree lived, he in these fields lived on.

Too rare, too rare, grow now my visits here !
But once I knew each field, each flower, each stick
And with the country-folk acquaintance made
By barn in threshing-time, by new-built rick.
Here, too, our shepherd-pipes we first assay'd.
Ah me ! this many a year
My pipe is lost, my shepherd's-holiday.
Needs must I lose them, needs with heavy heart
Into the world and wave of men depart ;
But Thyrsis of his own will went away.

It irk'd him to be here, he could not rest.
He loved each simple joy the country yields,
He loved his mates ; but yet he could not keep,
For that a shadow lower'd on the fields,
Here with the shepherds and the silly sheep.
Some life of men unblest
He knew, which made him droop, and fill'd his head.
He went ; his piping took a troubled sound
Of storms that rage outside our happy ground ;
He could not wait their passing, he is dead.

So, some tempestuous morn in early June,
When the year's primal burst of bloom is o'er,

Before the roses and the longest day—
When garden-walks, and all the grassy floor,
With blossoms, red and white, of fallen May,
And chestnut-flowers are strewn—
So have I heard the cuckoo's parting cry,
From the wet field, through the vext garden-trees,
Come with the volleying rain and tossing breeze :
The bloom is gone, and with the bloom go I !

Too quick despairer, wherefore wilt thou go ?
Soon will the high Midsummer pomps come on,
Soon will the musk carnations break and swell,
Soon shall we have gold-dusted snapdragon,
Sweet-William with its homely cottage-smell,
And stocks in fragrant blow ;
Roses that down the alleys shine afar,
And open, jasmine-muffled lattices,
And groups under the dreaming garden-trees,
And the full moon, and the white evening-star.

He hearkens not ! light comer, he is flown !
What matters it ? next year he will return,
And we shall have him in the sweet spring-days,
With whitening hedges, and uncrumpling fern,
And blue-bells trembling by the forest-ways,
And scent of hay new-mown.
But Thyrsis never more we swains shall see ;
See him come back, and cut a smoother reed,
And blow a strain the world at last shall heed—
For Time, not Corydon, hath conquer'd thee.

Alack, for Corydon no rival now !
But when Sicilian shepherds lost a mate,
Some good survivor with his flute would go,
Piping a ditty sad for Bion's fate,

And cross the unpermitted ferry's flow,
And unbend Pluto's brow,
And make leap up with joy the beauteous head
Of Proserpine, among whose crowned hair
Are flowers, first open'd on Sicilian air ;
And flute his friend, like Orpheus, from the dead.

O easy access to the hearer's grace,
When Dorian shepherds sang to Proserpine !
For she herself had trod Sicilian fields,
She knew the Dorian water's gush divine,
She knew each lily white which Enna yields,
Each rose with blushing face ;
She loved the Dorian pipe, the Dorian strain.
But ah, of our poor Thames she never heard !
Her foot the Cumner cowslips never stirr'd ;
And we should tease her with our plaint in vain.

Well ! wind-dispersed and vain the words will be,
Yet, Thyrsis, let me give my grief its hour
In the old haunt, and find our tree-topp'd hill !
Who, if not I, for questing here hath power ?
I know the wood which hides the daffodil,
I know the Fyfield tree,
I know what white, what purple fritillaries
The grassy harvest of the river-fields,
Above by Ensham, down by Sandford, yields ;
And what sedged brooks are Thames's tributaries ;

I know these slopes ; who knows them if not I ?—
But many a dingle on the loved hill-side,
With thorns once studded, old, white-blossom'd trees,
Where thick the cowslips grew, and, far descried,
High tower'd the spikes of purple orchises,
Hath since our day put by

The coronals of that forgotten time ;
Down each green bank hath gone the ploughboy's team,
And only in the hidden brookside gleam
Primroses, orphans of the flowery prime.

Where is the girl, who, by the boatman's door,
Above the locks, above the boating throng,
Unmoor'd our skiff, when, through the Wytham flats,
Red loosestrife and blond meadow-sweet among,
And darting swallows, and light water-gnats,
We track'd the shy Thames shore ?
Where are the mowers, who, as the tiny swell
Of our boat passing heaved the river-grass,
Stood with suspended scythe to see us pass ?
They are all gone, and thou art gone as well.

Yes, thou art gone, and round me too the Night
In ever-nearing circle weaves her shade.
I see her veil draw soft across the day,
I feel her slowly chilling breath invade
The cheek grown thin, the brown hair sprent with grey ;
I feel her finger light
Laid pausefully upon life's headlong train ;
The foot less prompt to meet the morning dew,
The heart less bounding at emotion new,
And hope, once crush'd, less quick to spring again.

And long the way appears, which seem'd so short
To the unpractised eye of sanguine youth ;
And high the mountain-tops, in cloudy air,
The mountain-tops where is the throne of Truth,
Tops in life's morning-sun so bright and bare.
Unbreachable the fort

Of the long-batter'd world uplifts its wall ;
And strange and vain the earthly turmoil grows,
And near and real the charm of thy repose,
And Night as welcome as a friend would fall.

But hush ! the upland hath a sudden loss
Of quiet ;—Look ! adown the dusk hill-side
A troop of Oxford hunters going home,
As in old days, jovial and talking, ride.
From hunting with the Berkshire hounds they come.
Quick ! let me fly, and cross
Into yon further field !—'Tis done ; and see,
Back'd by the sunset, which doth glorify
The orange and pale violet evening-sky,
Bare on its lonely ridge, the Tree ! the Tree !

I take the omen ! Eve lets down her veil,
The white fog creeps from bush to bush about,
The west unflushes, the high stars grow bright,
And in the scatter'd farms the lights come out.
I cannot reach the Signal-Tree to-night,
Yet, happy omen, hail !
Hear it from thy broad lucent Arnovale
(For there thine earth-forgetting eyelids keep
The morningless and unawakening sleep
Under the flowery oleanders pale),

Hear it, O Thyrsis, still our Tree is there !—
Ah, vain ! These English fields, this upland dim,
These brambles pale with mist engarlanded,
That lone, sky-pointing Tree, are not for him.
To a boon southern country he is fled,
And now in happier air,

Wandering with the great Mother's train divine
(And purer or more subtle soul than thee,
I trow, the mighty Mother doth not see!)
Within a folding of the Apennine,

Thou hearest the immortal strains of old.
Putting his sickle to the perilous grain,
In the hot cornfield of the Phrygian king,
For thee the Lityerses song again
Young Daphnis with his silver voice doth sing;
Sings his Sicilian fold,
His sheep, his hapless love, his blinded eyes;
And how a call celestial round him rang,
And heavenward from the fountain-brink he sprang,
And all the marvel of the golden skies.

There thou art gone, and me thou leavest here,
Sole in these fields; yet will I not despair.
Despair I will not, while I yet descry
Neath the soft canopy of English air
That lonely Tree against the western sky.
Still, still these slopes, 'tis clear,
Our Gipsy-Scholar haunts, outliving thee!
Fields where the sheep from cages pull the hay,
Woods with anemones in flower till May,
Know him a wanderer still; then why not me?

A fugitive and gracious light he seeks,
Shy to illumine; and I seek it too.
This does not come with houses or with gold,
With place, with honour, and a flattering crew
'Tis not in the world's market bought and sold.
But the smooth-slipping weeks
Drop by, and leave its seeker still untired.
Out of the heed of mortals he is gone,

He wends unfollow'd, he must house alone ;
Yet on he fares, by his own heart inspired.

Thou too, O Thyrsis, on like quest wert bound,
Thou wanderedst with me for a little hour.
Men gave thee nothing ; but this happy quest,
If men esteem'd thee feeble, gave thee power,
If men procured thee trouble, gave thee rest.
And this rude Cumner ground,
Its fir-topped Hurst, its farms, its quiet fields,
Here cam'st thou in thy jocund youthful time,
Here was thine height of strength, thy golden prime ;
And still the haunt beloved a virtue yields.

What though the music of thy rustic flute
Kept not for long its happy, country tone ;
Lost it too soon, and learnt a stormy note
Of men contention-tost, of men who groan,
Which task'd thy pipe too sore, and tired thy throat—
It fail'd, and thou wert mute.
Yet hadst thou alway visions of our light,
And long with men of care thou couldst not stay,
And soon thy foot resumed its wandering way,
Left human haunt, and on alone till night.

Too rare, too rare, grow now my visits here !
'Mid city-noise, not, as with thee of yore,
Thyrsis, in reach of sheep-bells is my home.
Then through the great town's harsh, heart-wearying roar,
Let in thy voice a whisper often come,
To chase fatigue and fear :
Why faintest thou ? I wander'd till I died.
Roam on ; the light we sought is shining still.

Dost thou ask proof? Our Tree yet crowns the hill,
Our Scholar travels yet the loved hill-side.

Arnold himself has left an interesting criticism of this poem. "One has the feeling," he wrote to Principal Shairp, "if one reads the poem as a memorial poem, that not enough is said about Clough in it; I feel this so much that I do not send the poem to Mrs. Clough. Still Clough *had* his idyllic side, too; to deal with this suited my desire to deal again with that Cumner country: anyway, only so could I treat the matter this time." It is just because the poet treated the matter "so," and not in any other way, that the poem stands so far above his other elegies, "Heine's Grave," "Haworth Churchyard," or the "Memorial Verses" written on the death of Wordsworth. "Thyrsis" may not contain the whole of Clough; but it contains the best of Arnold.

Besides Clough, who was some three years his senior, Matthew Arnold had several other friends at Oxford who were destined to distinction in after-life. One of these was John Campbell Shairp, the Principal Shairp just referred to. Another was John Duke Coleridge, afterwards Lord Chief Justice of England, who has put it on record that Arnold was a member of a select debating society known as "The Decade." No doubt these brilliant young men "tired the sun with talking" on many subjects. Arnold, we know, was, unlike Clough, utterly indifferent

to the Tractarian movement, which was then at its height. But if he was not yet interested in religious or political questions, he was soon to become so. In literature, although he had already felt the influence of Wordsworth and probably of Goethe, his tastes were mainly classical. Homer, Epictetus, and, above all, Sophocles, as he says in the famous sonnet "To a Friend," which saw the light a few years later, were his favourite companions, the solace of a youth which, gaily as it was carried, must have been a time of much spiritual turmoil.

TO A FRIEND

Who prop, thou ask'st, in these bad days, my mind ?
He much, the old man, who, clearest-soul'd of men,
Saw The Wide Prospect, and the Asian Fen,
And Tmolus' hill, and Smyrna's bay, though blind.
Much he, whose friendship I not long since won,
That halting slave, who in Nicopolis
Taught Arrian, when Vespasian's brutal son
Clear'd Rome of what most shamed him. But be his
My special thanks, whose even-balanc'd soul,
From first youth tested up to extreme old age,
Business could not make dull, nor passion wild :
Who saw life steadily, and saw it whole :
The mellow glory of the Attic stage ;
Singer of sweet Colonus, and its child.

We think of Matthew Arnold, with his beautiful smile, as the suave cosmopolitan ; the debonair author of "Friendship's Garland" ; the living argument for his own gospel of Culture ; Sweetness and Light incarnate. We

do not sufficiently distinguish between the young poet and the mature prose-writer. It is true that he was no Byron to carry across Europe "the pageant of his bleeding heart"; no Swinburne to have

> twisted through his hair
> Such tendrils as the wild Loves wear,
> And heard what mirth the Mænads made.

When he read of Shelley's circle in Dowden's "Life," he exclaimed "What a set!" He thought Shelley's poetry lacked sanity, and the fiery appearance of Swinburne in the poetic firmament drove the apostle of Hellenism several degrees towards Hebraism. These judgments were passed when he was no longer a young man; but from the first the classics meant for him Sophocles, while for Swinburne, if they sometimes meant Æschylus, they often meant Catullus and occasionally Petronius. The difference is essential. Arnold was always reflective, always trying to see life steadily and see it whole. When, in poems among his earliest, he contrasts youth and age, he writes, one feels, with greater prescience of and, one is tempted to add, with greater sympathy for the future than feeling for the present. This frame of mind is apparent in "Lines written by a Death-bed," of which the second stanza was subsequently separated and re-christened "Youth and Calm" while the first was embedded in "Iseult of Ireland"; and it also makes itself felt in the fine sonnet "Youth's Agitations."

YOUTH'S AGITATIONS

When I shall be divorced some ten years hence,
From this poor present self which I am now ;
When youth has done its tedious vain expense
Of passions that for ever ebb and flow ;
Shall I not joy youth's heats are left behind,
And breathe more happy in an even clime ?
Ah no, for then I shall begin to find
A thousand virtues in this hated time.
Then I shall wish its agitations back,
And all its thwarting currents of desire ;
Then I shall praise the heat which then I lack,
And call this hurrying fever, generous fire,
And sigh that one thing only has been lent
To youth and age in common—discontent.

Yet, when all is said, Arnold was once young and always a poet. His gentle personality was forged in the fire. He had his period of storm and stress, which was not exclusively the fruit of intellectual searchings. In view of his reticence—in view, especially, of the fact that he deliberately discouraged the writing of his biography in any detail—it behoves us to tread this ground discreetly. But in an attempt to see a poet through the medium of his poetry, it is surely permitted to use whatever data that poetry affords. And Arnold's poetry is peculiarly full of data. Early sonnets, as well as later elegies, are often of the "occasional" order. Moreover, the poet was sometimes specific where others would have preferred vagueness All lyrics are personal in a general sense. One series, at least, of Arnold's is personal in a

particular sense; the series, that is to say, to which the title "Switzerland" was given.

In his first book was a short poem "To my Friends who ridiculed a tender Leave-taking." To this circumstantial heading was afterwards prefixed "A Memory-Picture," the original title finally being dropped. The poem concerns a certain Marguerite, whose charms are described with a graceful precision worthy of the seventeenth century—a comparison rarely suggested by Arnold's work. The lady is the subject of four more pieces in the poet's second volume; but a year has elapsed since the tender leave-taking, and the returning lover has found that Marguerite has not kept herself so faithfully as he. *Hinc illæ lacrimæ.* These five poems formed the nucleus of "Switzerland," which in its final form consists of seven numbers, the "Memory-Picture" and "A Dream," which was for a time included, having been separated, and an epilogue having been supplied in "The Terrace at Berne," "composed ten years after the preceding." What one gathers from this sequence is that Arnold, when somewhere between twenty and thirty, was captivated by a fair, blue-eyed French girl at Berne, whose affection for the poet was not sufficiently deep to stand a year's separation, and that he for consolation turned to the clean joy of the mountains.

These poems are not among Arnold's best work, though they contain fine passages. "A Memory-Picture" is charmingly light of touch,

but the others smack a little of the prig, and are too often rhetorical where they ought to be passionate. The feeling in them is undoubtedly sincere, but Arnold lacked *abandon* and he moralises when he should be ecstatic. There is, however, another series, "Faded Leaves," of a nature similar to "Switzerland" but rather less circumstantial; and in this, the range of emotion being more limited, the result is far more satisfying. The final piece, "Longing," may be quoted as perhaps the most perfect of Arnold's love lyrics; the reservation being made, however, that others have finer *moments* and that less personal, or more deliberately philosophical, poems in which love is the theme are not at present under consideration.

LONGING

Come to me in my dreams, and then
By day I shall be well again.
For then the night will more than pay
The hopeless longing of the day.

Come, as thou cam'st a thousand times
A messenger from radiant climes,
And smile on thy new world, and be
As kind to others as to me.

Or, as thou never cam'st in sooth,
Come now, and let me dream it truth.
And part my hair, and kiss my brow,
And say—My love! why sufferest thou?

Come to me in my dreams, and then
By day I shall be well again.
For then the night will more than pay
The hopeless longing of the day.

In one of the poems to Marguerite there is a passage in which he apostrophises his own heart as

> thou lonely heart,
> Which never yet without remorse
> Even for a moment didst depart
> From thy remote and spherèd course
> To haunt the place where passions reign—
> Back to thy solitude again !

This gives the measure of the significance of the Marguerite poems and justifies our dwelling on the matter in a way which savours, perhaps, of impertinence. Nothing better illustrates Arnold's natural austerity than this apparent departure from it. He was no æsthete in quest of emotions. Intensely fastidious, he was obviously ill at ease in his adventure and, however he might regret its conclusion, glad to get back to the large, impersonal love of Nature and to intellectual joys. Like Christina Rossetti, he had a strong sense of the solitude of the human soul. The idea runs through much of his poetry, coming to its finest expression in "The Buried Life," though here the thought is that our real personality is hidden even from ourselves and that only love, and that but rarely, can bring it to the light.

THE BURIED LIFE

> Light flows our war of mocking words, and yet,
> Behold, with tears my eyes are wet.
> I feel a nameless sadness o'er me roll.
> Yes, yes, we know that we can jest,

We know, we know that we can smile ;
But there's a something in this breast
To which thy light words bring no rest
And thy gay smiles no anodyne.
  Give me thy hand, and hush awhile,
And turn those limpid eyes on mine,
And let me read there, love, thy inmost soul.

Alas, is even Love too weak
To unlock the heart and let it speak ?
Are even lovers powerless to reveal
To one another what indeed they feel ?
I knew the mass of men conceal'd
Their thoughts, for fear that if reveal'd
They would by other men be met
With blank indifference, or with blame reproved :
I knew they lived and moved
Trick'd in disguises, alien to the rest
Of men, and alien to themselves—and yet
  There beats one heart in every human breast.
But we, my love—does a like spell benumb
Our hearts—our voices ?—must we too be dumb ?

Ah, well for us, if even we,
Even for a moment, can get free
Our heart, and have our lips unchain'd :
  For that which seals them hath been deep ordain'd.

Fate, which foresaw
How frivolous a baby man would be,
By what distractions he would be possess'd,
How he would pour himself in every strife,
And well-nigh change his own identity ;
That it might keep from his capricious play
His genuine self, and force him to obey

Even in his own despite, his being's law,
Bade, through the deep recesses of our breast,
The unregarded river of our life
Pursue with indiscernible flow its way ;
And that we should not see
The buried stream, and seem to be
Eddying about in blind uncertainty,
Though driving on with it eternally.
But often in the world's most crowded streets,
But often, in the din of strife,
There rises an unspeakable desire
After the knowledge of our buried life,
A thirst to spend our fire and restless force
In tracking out our true, original course ;
A longing to enquire
Into the mystery of this heart that beats
So wild, so deep in us, to know
Whence our thoughts come, and where they go.
And many a man in his own breast then delves,
But deep enough, alas, none ever mines :
And we have been on many thousand lines,
And we have shown on each talent and power,
But hardly have we, for one little hour,
Been on our own line, have we been ourselves ;
Hardly had skill to utter one of all
The nameless feelings that course through our breast
But they course on for ever unexpress'd.
And long we try in vain to speak and act
Our hidden self, and what we say and do
Is eloquent, is well—but 'tis not true :
And then we will no more be rack'd
With inward striving, and demand
Of all the thousand things of the hour
Their stupefying power,
Ah yes, and they benumb us at our call ;

Yet still, from time to time, vague and forlorn,
From the soul's subterranean depth upborne
As from an infinitely distant land,
Come airs, and floating echoes, and convey
A melancholy into all our day.

Only—but this is rare—
When a beloved hand is laid in ours,
When, jaded with the rush and glare
Of the interminable hours,
Our eyes can in another's eyes read clear,
When our world-deafen'd ear
Is by the tones of a loved voice caress'd,
  A bolt is shot back somewhere in our breast
And a lost pulse of feeling stirs again :
The eye sinks inward, and the heart lies plain,
And what we mean, we say, and what we would, we know.
A man becomes aware of his life's flow
And hears its winding murmur, and he sees
The meadows where it glides, the sun, the breeze.
And there arrives a lull in the hot race
Wherein he doth for ever chase
That flying and elusive shadow, Rest.
An air of coolness plays upon his face,
And an unwonted calm pervades his breast.
  And then he thinks he knows
The Hills where his life rose,
And the Sea where it goes.

The conviction of man's essential loneliness expressed in such poems as this inevitably drove Arnold to the contemplation of Nature and his own soul. His worship of Nature, Wordsworthian though the form it took, was spontaneous :

cause rather than effect of his admiration for the older poet. It is present as an essence in all his work. Nature is grander than man, he says; and even when paying tribute to Wordsworth he makes her say:

> The singer was less than his themes,
> Life, and emotion, and I.

In the poem from which these lines are quoted and its companion piece, "The Youth of Nature" and "The Youth of Man," he confesses his faith more explicitly, perhaps, than anywhere else. Nature is calm and eternal, the ordinary life of man transient and futile. Our only hope of salvation, of that peace which Arnold held to be the true end of life, lies in learning her large, impersonal harmonies.

> While the locks are yet brown on thy head,
> While the soul still looks through thine eyes,
> While the heart still pours
> The mantling blood to thy cheek,
> Sink, O Youth, in thy soul!
> Yearn to the greatness of Nature!
> Rally the good in the depths of thyself.

It is scarcely necessary to point out that this is no vague, passive, Nirvanic creed. The "buried life" and the peace of Nature are essentially one. We must strive to pierce through the outer discords, in order that we may find the harmony within our souls. Arnold's teaching is summed up in the old Greek precept, "Know

thyself " ; the justification of the precept being contained in that other saying, " The Kingdom of God is within you." Perhaps this is most beautifully and clearly stated in the following lyric :

SELF-DEPENDENCE

Weary of myself, and sick of asking
What I am, and what I ought to be,
At the vessel's prow I stand, which bears me
Forwards, forwards, o'er the star-lit sea.

And a look of passionate desire
O'er the sea and to the stars I send :
" Ye who from my childhood up have calm'd me,
Calm me, ah, compose me to the end.

" Ah, once more," I cried, " Ye Stars, Ye Waters,
On my heart your mighty charm renew :
Still, still, let me, as I gaze upon you,
Feel my soul becoming vast like you."

From the intense, clear, star-sown vault of heaven,
Over the lit sea's unquiet way,
In the rustling night-air came the answer—
" Wouldst thou *be* as these are ? *live* as they.

" Unaffrighted by the silence round them,
Undistracted by the sights they see,
These demand not that the things without them
Yield them love, amusement, sympathy.

" And with joy the stars perform their shining,
And the sea its long moon-silver'd roll.
For alone they live, nor pine with noting
All the fever of some differing soul.

" Bounded by themselves, and unobservant
In what state God's other works may be,
In their own tasks all their powers pouring,
These attain the mighty life you see."

O air-born Voice ! long since, severely clear,
A cry like thine in my own heart I hear.
" Resolve to be thyself : and know, that he
Who finds himself, loses his misery."

We are to attain, therefore, to the life of the sea and the stars. But in the arrangement of his poems which Arnold himself made, " Self-Dependence " is followed by " Morality," in which we are told that in our very efforts, our " strife divine," we achieve something of which Nature, just because she is Nature, is incapable.

MORALITY

We cannot kindle when we will
The fire that in the heart resides
The spirit bloweth and is still,
In mystery our soul abides :
  But tasks in hours of insight will'd
Can be through hours of gloom fulfill'd.

With aching hands and bleeding feet
We dig and heap, lay stone on stone ;
We bear the burden and the heat
Of the long day, and wish 'twere done.
  Not till the hours of light return
All we have built do we discern.

Then, when the clouds are off the soul,
When thou dost bask in Nature's eye,

Ask, how *she* view'd thy self-control,
Thy struggling task'd morality—
  Nature, whose free, light, cheerful air,
Oft made thee, in thy gloom, despair.

And she, whose censure thou dost dread,
Whose eyes thou wert afraid to seek,
See, on her face a glow is spread,
A strong emotion on her cheek.
  "Ah child," she cries, "that strife divine—
Whence was it, for it is not mine?

  "There is no effort on *my* brow—
I do not strive, I do not weep.
I rush with the swift spheres, and glow
In joy, and, when I will, I sleep.—
  Yet that severe, that earnest air,
I saw, I felt it once—but where?

  "I knew not yet the gauge of Time,
Nor wore the manacles of Space.
I felt it in some other clime—
I saw it in some other place.
  —'Twas when the heavenly house I trod,
And lay upon the breast of God."

There is Matthew Arnold's morality, as he conceived it at the age of thirty and as he held it all his life. Later on, in "Culture and Anarchy," he was to preach Hellenism—"a term for giving our consciousness free play and enlarging its range," the gospel of criticism before action. He practised what he preached. But if one wanted to define his moral code, one could not do better than borrow his own defini-

tion of Hebraism : " To walk staunchly by the best light one has, to be strict and sincere with oneself, not to be of the number of those who say and do not, to be in earnest,—this is the discipline by which alone man is enabled to rescue his life from thraldom to the passing moment and to his bodily senses, to ennoble it, and to make it eternal. And this discipline has been nowhere so effectively taught as in the school of Hebraism." [1]

What it comes to is this. Arnold, living in the England of Early Victorian Liberalism, saw that what his countrymen wanted was the critical rather than the moral sense. So he insisted on Hellenism as a means of restoring the balance. But it was merely the accident of the times. It has already been mentioned that the phenomenon of Swinburne gave Hebraism a new value in his eyes. The phenomenon of Huxley had the same effect. Compared with Oscar Wilde, or even Pater, he was a Hebrew prophet, and not a Hebrew prophet in white kid gloves, as some one called him. His true ideal, in fact, was a perfect synthesis of the two qualities. That is what " Morality " means.

> But tasks in hours of insight will'd
> Can be through hours of gloom fulfill'd

is simply a way of saying that what the Hellenic part of us has conceived the Hebraic can achieve. This duality is nowhere better expressed than in the sonnet which stood alike at the beginning

[1] "Culture and Anarchy": Preface.

of Arnold's first volume of poems and at the beginning of his final collection.

QUIET WORK

One lesson, Nature, let me learn of thee—
One lesson that in every wind is blown,
One lesson of two duties served in one,
Though the loud world proclaim their enmity—
Of Toil unsever'd from Tranquillity
Of Labour, that in still advance outgrows
Far noisier schemes, accomplish'd in Repose,
Too great for haste, too high for rivalry.
Yes, while on earth a thousand discords ring,
Man's senseless uproar mingling with his toil,
Still do thy sleepless ministers move on,
Their glorious tasks in silence perfecting ;
Still working, blaming still our vain turmoil ;
Labourers that shall not fail, when man is gone.

This sonnet leads naturally to the consideration of Arnold's attitude towards that part of his own work which is here our main concern. I do not mean his criticism of poetry as an art, which will be touched on presently, but rather his thoughts as to the poet's lot and place in the world.

It has been observed, by one who had the subtlety to know better,[1] that Matthew Arnold was not a poet but a man who wrote poetry. If this means anything more than that he did not cultivate the extravagant externals affected by some of the brotherhood, it presumably implies that he wrote because he wanted to

[1] The late Mary Coleridge.

rather than because he must, which is almost certainly true. But he was no less a poet for that. Whether or no the theory of compulsion is a romantic illusion is beside the question. No one could possibly look on Arnold's poetry as a dilettante's exercise in versification. It is intensely sincere, invariably lofty in conception, and wrought with an artist's care. Not much more than that can be profitably claimed for any work of art.

It may be admitted that Arnold's attitude towards his art lacked the fervour of romanticism. He defined poetry as a criticism of life, and that definition is adequate for most, if not all, of his own work. But though this may limit his conception of poetry, it did not diminish in his eyes the high calling of the poet. His, no less than Shelley's, was a "white ideal"; but it was of a cold rather than a blazing whiteness.

In one of his later sonnets—"Austerity of Poetry"—Arnold likens the muse to the gaily dressed bride of Giacopone di Todi, who was found, when dead, to be wearing "a robe of sackcloth next the smooth, white skin." In "Resignation" he conceives of the poet as subduing his wayward energies to a calm, impersonal vision and comprehension of life.

> The Poet, to whose mighty heart
> Heaven doth a quicker pulse impart,
> Subdues that energy to scan
> Not his own course, but that of Man.
> Though he moves mountains; though his day
> Be pass'd on the proud heights of sway;

Though he had loosed a thousand chains ;
Though he had borne immortal pains ;
Action and suffering though he know ;
—He hath not lived, if he lives so.
He sees, in some great-historied land,
A ruler of the people stand ;
Sees his strong thought in fiery flood
Roll through the heaving multitude ;
Exults : yet for no moment's space
Envies the all-regarded place.
Beautiful eyes meet his ; and he
Bears to admire uncravingly :
They pass ; he, mingled with the crowd,
Is in their far-off triumphs proud.
From some high station he looks down,
At sunset, on a populous town ;
Surveys each happy group that fleets,
Toil ended, through the shining streets ;
Each with some errand of its own ;—
And does not say, " I am alone."
He sees the gentle stir of birth
When Morning purifies the earth ;
He leans upon a gate, and sees
The pastures, and the quiet trees.
Low woody hill, with gracious bound,
Folds the still valley almost round ;
The cuckoo, loud on some high lawn,
Is answer'd from the depth of dawn ;
In the hedge straggling to the stream,
Pale, dew-drench'd, half-shut roses gleam :
But where the further side slopes down
He sees the drowsy new-waked clown
In his white quaint-embroidered frock
Make, whistling, towards his mist-wreathed flock ;
Slowly, behind the heavy tread,
The wet flower's grass heaves up its head.—

Lean'd on his gate, he gazes : tears
Are in his eyes, and in his ears
The murmur of a thousand years :
Before him he sees Life unroll,
A placid and continuous whole ;
That general Life, which does not cease,
Whose secret is not joy, but peace ;
That Life, whose dumb wish is not miss'd
If birth proceeds, if things subsist ;
The Life of plants, and stones, and rain :
The Life he craves ; if not in vain
Fate gave, what Chance shall not controul,
His sad lucidity of soul.

But it is in the poem which gave a name to Arnold's earliest volume and remains, in spite of certain imperfections of rhythm, almost, if not quite, his highest achievement both for thought and for language ; it is in "The Strayed Reveller" that he has his completest vision of the poet's lot, to see like a god and to suffer like a man ; a finer and truer conception, surely, than that of "Resignation." This superb poem must here be given in full, as it should be given in all selections of English poetry, as an example of the finest flower of the classic tradition nourished on our soil. Nowhere are Arnold's crystalline clarity of expression and his power of giving simple description a lyric quality more in evidence.

THE STRAYED REVELLER

A YOUTH. CIRCE

THE YOUTH

Faster, faster,
O Circe, Goddess,
Let the wild, thronging train,
The bright procession
Of eddying forms,
Sweep through my soul.

Thou standest, smiling
Down on me ; thy right arm
Lean'd up against the column there,
Props thy soft cheek ;
Thy left holds, hanging loosely,
The deep cup, ivy-cinctured,
I held but now.

Is it then evening
So soon ? I see, the night dews,
Cluster'd in thick beads, dim
The agate brooch-stones
On thy white shoulder.
The cool night-wind, too,
Blows through the portico,
Stirs thy hair, Goddess,
Waves thy white robe.

CIRCE

Whence art thou, sleeper ?

THE YOUTH

When the white dawn first
Through the rough fir-planks

Of my hut, by the chestnuts,
Up at the valley-head,
Came breaking, Goddess,
I sprang up, I threw round me
My dappled fawn-skin :
Passing out, from the wet turf,
Where they lay, by the hut door,
I snatch'd up my vine-crown, my fir-staff
All drench'd in dew :
Came swift down to join
The rout early gather'd
In the town, round the temple,
Iacchus' white fane
On yonder hill.

Quick I pass'd, following
The wood-cutters' cart-track
Down the dark valley ;—I saw
On my left, through the beeches,
Thy palace, Goddess,
Smokeless, empty :
Trembling, I enter'd ; beheld
The court all silent,
The lions sleeping ;
On the altar, this bowl.
I drank, Goddess—
And sunk down here, sleeping,
On the steps of thy portico.

CIRCE

Foolish boy ! Why tremblest thou ?
Thou lovest it, then, my wine ?
Wouldst more of it ? See, how glows,
Through the delicate flush'd marble,
The red creaming liquor,
Strown with dark seeds !

Drink, then! I chide thee not,
Deny thee not my bowl.
Come, stretch forth thy hand, then—so,—
Drink, drink again!

THE YOUTH

Thanks, gracious One!
Ah, the sweet fumes again
More soft, ah me!
More subtle-winding
Than Pan's flute-music.
Faint—faint! Ah me!
Again the sweet sleep.

CIRCE

Hist! Thou—within there!
Come forth, Ulysses!
Art tired with hunting?
While we range the woodland,
See what the day brings.

ULYSSES

Ever new magic!
Hast thou then lur'd hither,
Wonderful Goddess, by thy art,
The young, languid-eyed Ampelus,
Iacchus' darling—
Or some youth belov'd of Pan,
Of Pan and the Nymphs?
That he sits, bending downward
His white, delicate neck
To the ivy-wreath'd marge
Of thy cup:—the bright, glancing vine-leaves
That crown his hair,
Falling forwards, mingling
With the dark ivy-plants;

His fawn-skin, half untied,
Smear'd with red wine-stains ? Who is he,
That he sits, overweigh'd
By fumes of wine and sleep,
So late, in thy portico ?
What youth, Goddess,—what guest
Of Gods or mortals ?

CIRCE

Hist ! he wakes !
I lur'd him not hither, Ulysses.
Nay, ask him !

THE YOUTH

Who speaks ? Ah ! Who comes forth
To thy side, Goddess, from within ?
How shall I name him ?
This spare, dark-featur'd,
Quick-eyed stranger ?
Ah ! and I see too
His sailor's bonnet,
His short coat, travel-tarnish'd,
With one arm bare.—
Art thou not he, whom fame
This long time rumours
The favour'd guest of Circe, brought by the waves ?
Art thou he, stranger ?
The wise Ulysses,
Laertes' son ?

ULYSSES

I am Ulysses.
And thou, too, sleeper ?
Thy voice is sweet.
It may be that thou hast follow'd
Through the islands some divine bard,

By age taught many things,
Age and the Muses,
And heard him delighting
The chiefs and people
In the banquet, and learn'd his songs,
Of Gods and Heroes,
Of war and arts,
And peopled cities
Inland, or built
By the grey sea.—If so, then hail!
I honour and welcome thee.

THE YOUTH

The Gods are happy.
They turn on all sides
Their shining eyes:
And see, below them,
The Earth, and men.

They see Tiresias
Sitting, staff in hand,
On the warm, grassy
Asopus' bank:
His robe drawn over
His old, sightless head:
Revolving inly
The doom of Thebes.

They see the Centaurs
In the upper glens
Of Pelion, in the streams,
Where red-berried ashes fringe
The clear-brown shallow pools;
With streaming flanks, and heads
Rear'd proudly, snuffing
The mountain wind.

They see the Indian
Drifting, knife in hand,
His frail boat moor'd to
A floating isle thick matted
With large-leav'd, low-creeping melon-plants,
And the dark cucumber.
He reaps, and stows them,
Drifting—drifting :—round him,
Round his green harvest-plot,
Flow the cool lake-waves :
The mountains ring them.

They see the Scythian
On the wide Stepp, unharnessing
His wheel'd house at noon.
He tethers his beast down, and makes his meal
Mare's milk, and bread
Baked on the embers :—all around
The boundless waving grass-plains stretch, thick-starr'd
With saffron and the yellow hollyhock
And flag-leav'd iris flowers.
Sitting in his cart
He makes his meal : before him, for long miles,
Alive with bright green lizards,
And the springing bustard fowl,
The track, a straight black line,
Furrows the rich soil : here and there
Clusters of lonely mounds
Topp'd with rough-hewn
Grey, rain-blear'd statues, overpeer
The sunny Waste.
They see the Ferry
On the broad, clay-laden
Lone Chorasmian stream : thereon
With snort and strain,

Two horses, strongly swimming, tow
The ferry-boat, with woven ropes
To either bow
Firm-harness'd by the mane :—a chief,
With shout and shaken spear
Stands at the prow, and guides them : but astern,
The cowering Merchants, in long robes,
Sit pale beside their wealth
Of silk-bales and of balsam-drops,
Of gold and ivory,
Of turquoise-earth and amethyst,
Jasper and chalcedony,
And milk-barr'd onyx stones.
The loaded boat swings groaning
In the yellow eddies.
The Gods behold them.

They see the Heroes
Sitting in the dark ship
On the foamless, ong-heaving,
Violet sea :
At sunset nearing
The Happy Islands.
These things, Ulysses,
The wise Bards also
Behold and sing.
But oh, what labour !
O Prince, what pain !

They too can see
Tiresias :—but the Gods,
Who give them vision,
Added this law :
That they should bear too
His groping blindness,
His dark foreboding.

His scorn'd white hairs ;
Bear Hera's anger
Through a life lengthen'd
To seven ages.

They see the centaurs
On Pelion :—then they feel,
They too, the maddening wine
Swell their large veins to bursting : in wild pain
They feel the biting spears
Of the grim Lapithæ, and Theseus, drive,
Drive crashing through their bones : they feel
High on a jutting rock in the red stream
Alcmena's dreadful son
Ply his bow :—such a price
The Gods exact for song ;
To become what we sing.

They see the Indian
On his mountain lake :—but squalls
Make their skiff reel, and worms
I' the unkind spring have gnaw'd
Their melon-harvest to the heart : They see
The Scythian :—but long frosts
Parch them in winter-time on the bare Stepp,
Till they too fade like grass : they crawl
Like shadows forth in spring.

They see the Merchants
On the Oxus stream :—but care
Must visit first them too, and make them pale.
Whether, through whirling sand,
A cloud of desert robber-horse has burst
Upon their caravan : or greedy kings,
In the wall'd cities the way passes through,

Crush'd them with tolls : or fever-airs,
On some great river's marge,
Mown them down, far from home.

They see the Heroes
Near harbour :—but they share
Their lives, and former violent toil, in Thebes,
Seven-gated Thebes, or Troy :
Or where the echoing oars
Of Argo, first,
Startled the unknown Sea.

The old Silenus
Came, lolling in the sunshine,
From the dewy forest coverts,
This way, at noon.
Sitting by me, while his Fauns
Down at the water side
Sprinkled and smooth'd
His drooping garland,
He told me these things.
But I, Ulysses,
Sitting on the warm steps,
Looking over the valley,
All day long, have seen,
Without pain, without labour,
Sometimes a wild-hair'd Mænad ;
Sometimes a Faun with torches ;
And sometimes, for a moment,
Passing through the dark stems
Flowing-robed—the beloved,
The desired, the divine,
Beloved Iacchus.

Ah cool night-wind, tremulous stars !
Ah glimmering water—

Fitful earth-murmur—
Dreaming woods!
Ah golden-hair'd, strangely-smiling Goddess,
And thou, proved, much enduring,
Wave-toss'd Wanderer!
Who can stand still?
Ye fade, ye swim, ye waver before me.
The cup again!

Faster, faster,
O Circe, Goddess,
Let the wild thronging train,
The bright procession
Of eddying forms,
Sweep through my soul!

II

THE ideas which the foregoing pages are an attempt to formulate were doubtless developed in Arnold's mind mainly during the years immediately following those which he spent at Oxford, where they had their origins, one suspects, in conversations with Coleridge, Clough and the rest. This excursion is, therefore, justified by chronology.

The external events of the poet's life during the same period can be briefly narrated. Having taken a second class in classics, Arnold was in 1845 elected to a fellowship of Oriel College, which, as Mr. Herbert Paul says, was then considered "the most brilliant crown of an Oxford career." He was not, however, content, like Pater, to settle down to a don's life of

cultured seclusion, and for a few months he taught Latin and Greek to the fifth form of his old school, then under the sway of Archibald Campbell Tait.

Then, in 1847, he obtained the post of private secretary to the Marquess of Lansdowne, who at that time sat in Lord John Russell's cabinet as Lord President of the Council. The three years during which he held this appointment saw the formation of his political opinions, which were moulded to a considerable extent on those of his chief. Lord Lansdowne was a Whig of a fine old type. Arnold, who always called himself a Liberal and hoped for a "final and happy consummation . . . the permanent establishment of Liberalism in power," was ever a Whig rather than a Radical. His treatment of the official Liberals of the day in "Culture and Anarchy" was drastic from one who was at least nominally of their number. He was, in fact, a Whig without the true Whig's sense of the importance of the hereditary aristocracy; though, judging by the reason which he gave for what he thought was Byron's superiority over Heine, he at one time had something of that too. But that phase passed, and though he always took an æsthetic pleasure in the easy manners of the *noblesse*, the man who dubbed our ruling classes generically "Barbarians" cannot be accused of undue reverence for a big name. Still, he never became a democrat.

Very characteristic of the man is the pair of

sonnets "To a Republican Friend" (probably Clough), which were written in the stirring year 1848. The first, beginning "God knows it, I am with you," displays his humanity and fine sense of justice and scorn of

> The barren optimistic sophistries
> Of comfortable moles.

"Yet," begins the second,

> Yet, when I muse on what life is, I seem
> Rather to patience prompted, than that proud
> Prospect of hope which France proclaims so loud,
> France, famed in all great arts, in none supreme.
> Seeing this Vale, this Earth, whereon we dream,
> Is on all sides o'ershadowed by the high
> Uno'erleap'd Mountains of Necessity,
> Sparing us narrower margin than we deem.
> Nor will that day dawn at a human nod,
> When, bursting through the network superposed
> By selfish occupation—plot and plan,
> Lust, avarice, envy—liberated man,
> All difference with his fellow-man composed,
> Shall be left standing face to face with God.

This attitude of moderation, though not heroic, has a nobility of its own. Even in his politics Arnold was a classic rather than a romantic. The *aurea mediocritas* was his ideal. In July 1849, however, stirred by the heroism of Louis Kossuth, he published in the "Examiner" another sonnet apostrophising Hungary as the potential saviour of the world. But even here the fervour is a mild thing compared with the

fire with which Swinburne would fill a sonnet to the same patriot thirty years later ; and when after a lapse of ten years, Arnold wrote his pamphlet in favour of Italian independence, he no longer placed Hungary on a pedestal.

The sonnet "To the Hungarian Nation" seems to have been his first published poem. As he confessed to his mother, it was "not worth much," and he did not revive it. But the same year witnessed an event of which the importance was far from being appreciated at the time : the appearance of "The Strayed Reveller and Other Poems" by "A."

Matthew Arnold's poetic gift was not of precocious development. He was in his twenty-seventh year when his first book was published, and there is no evidence that any of the poems in it were more than a year or two old. It is true that at Rugby he had obtained a prize for a poem on "Alaric at Rome," and that at Oxford his "Cromwell" had won him the Newdigate. But winners of the Newdigate do not necessarily become famous poets. Arnold does not stand out as conspicuously more brilliant than his predecessors or successors, though I do not agree with Mr. Paul that "Cromwell" shows a falling-off from the standard of "Alaric at Rome." Both poems are written with much earnestness and sense of the solemnity of their subjects, both show the influence of Wordsworth, and both contain a number of good lines. The tendency to moralise, conspicuous in "Alaric at Rome," was not necessarily sympto-

matic of the future. In schoolboys' literature there is no mean between moralising and levity. Perhaps the most characteristic thing about these two productions is that they brought academic distinction to Matthew Arnold. They certainly do not foreshadow the wealth of beauty and thought that were contained in the little green book which was issued unobtrusively and pseudonymously towards the end of 1849.

"The Strayed Reveller and Other Poems" contains a fair proportion of Arnold's best verse. As a first volume, it is remarkable for its qualities of maturity and sobriety. The poet may have been doing practice work, which he was discreet enough to withhold from publicity. Such discretion would certainly have been characteristic. It seems, indeed, that he wrote other verses at Oxford besides "Cromwell." "Here, too, our shepherd-pipes we first assay'd," he says in "Thyrsis." But before he thought fit to publish a book he was full-fledged with all his virtues. Technically he never did better work than "Mycerinus" or "The Forsaken Merman." He never put deeper thought into any poem than he did into "Resignation."

Besides the title-piece, several of the poems already quoted or alluded to were in this book. "A Memory-Picture" appeared under its original name, and it also contained the sonnets "To a Friend," "To a Republican Friend," "Quiet Work"; together with some other sonnets, including the famous "Shakespeare."

SHAKESPEARE

Others abide our question. Thou art free.
We ask and ask : Thou smilest and art still,
Out-topping knowledge. For the loftiest hill
That to the stars uncrowns his majesty,
Planting his stedfast footsteps in the sea,
Making the Heaven of Heavens his dwelling-place,
Spares but the cloudy border of his base
To the foil'd searching of mortality :
And thou, who didst the stars and sunbeams know,
Self-school'd, self-scann'd, self-honour'd, self-secure,
Didst walk on Earth unguess'd at. Better so !
All pains the immortal spirit must endure,
All weakness that impairs, all griefs that bow,
Find their sole voice in that victorious brow.

The tenth line is neither good criticism nor particularly good poetry ; nor does the whole tally with Arnold's estimate of Shakespeare as expressed in prose—which, indeed, like his views on a good many things that Englishmen treasure, was too qualified for the majority of Englishmen to stomach. Such considerations, alien as they may be to a discussion of poetic merit, must affect our judgment of a work that so deliberately challenges them. But the sonnet is not quoted merely as a selector's offering on the altar of tradition. The simile that fills the middle of it is a piece of imagery unsurpassed in the whole range of Arnold's poetry.

But to return to the book. The loveliest flowers of the collection—in which " The Sick King in Bokhara " is the only notable failure—are

three in number: "The Strayed Reveller," "Mycerinus" and "The Forsaken Merman." The first of these has already been given. Room must be found for both the others.

The original of "Mycerinus" is to be found in the pages of Herodotus. The father of Mycerinus had ruled the people of Egypt tyrannously and lived an evil life. But he endured to old age in prosperity. Mycerinus, on the other hand, reigned justly and well, endeavouring to atone for his father's faults; yet the gods decreed that he must die after six years. The Egyptians had been doomed to a hundred years of oppression, and he had gone against that doom. Then Mycerinus vowed that the six years given him should be crammed with twelve years' pleasure. Arnold's poem opens at the moment when he is making his decision known to his devoted subjects:

MYCERINUS

"Not by the justice that my father spurn'd,
Not for the thousands whom my father slew,
Altars unfed and temples overturn'd,
Cold hearts and thankless tongues, where thanks were due;
Fell this late voice from lips that cannot lie,
Stern sentence of the Powers of Destiny.

"I will unfold my sentence and my crime.
My crime, that, rapt in reverential awe,
I sate obedient, in the fiery prime
Of youth, self-governed, at the feet of Law;
Ennobling this dull pomp, the life of kings,
By contemplation of diviner things.

" My father lov'd injustice, and liv'd long ;
Crowned with grey hairs he died, and full of sway.
I loved the good he scorn'd, and hated wrong :
The Gods declare my recompense to-day.
I looked for life more lasting, rule more high ;
And when six years are measur'd, lo, I die !

" Yet surely, O my people, did I deem
Man's justice from the all-just Gods was given :
A light that from some upper fount did beam,
Some better archetype, whose seat was heaven ;
A light that, shining from the blest abodes,
Did shadow somewhat of the life of Gods.

" Mere phantoms of man's self-tormenting heart,
Which on the sweets that woo it dares not feed :
Vain dreams, that quench our pleasures, then depart,
When the duped soul, self-mastered, claims its meed :
When, on the strenuous just man, Heaven bestows,
Crown of his struggling life, an unjust close.

" Seems it so light a thing then, austere Powers,
To spurn man's common lure, life's pleasant things ?
Seems there no joy in dances crown'd with flowers,
Love, free to range, and regal banquetings ?
Bend ye on these, indeed, an unmoved eye,
Not Gods but ghosts, in frozen apathy ?

" Or is it that some Power, too wise, too strong,
Even for yourselves to conquer or beguile,
Whirls earth, and heaven, and men, and gods along,
Like the broad rushing of the column'd Nile ?
And the great powers we serve, themselves may be
Slaves of a tyrannous Necessity ?

" Or in mid-heaven, perhaps, your golden cars,
Where earthly voice climbs never, wing their flight,
And in wild hunt, through mazy tracts of stars,
Sweep in the sounding stillness of the night ?
Or in deaf ease, on thrones of dazzling sheen,
Drinking deep draughts of joy, ye dwell serene.

" Oh wherefore cheat our youth, if thus it be,
Of one short joy, one lust, one pleasant dream ?
Stringing vain words of powers we cannot see,
Blind divinations of a will supreme ;
Lost labour : when the circumambient gloom
But hides, if Gods, Gods careless of our doom ?

" The rest I give to joy. Even while I speak
My sand runs short ; and as yon star-shot ray,
Hemmed by two banks of cloud, peers pale and weak,
Now, as the barrier closes, dies away ;
Even so do past and future intertwine,
Blotting this six years' space, which yet is mine.

" Six years—six little years—six drops of time—
Yet suns shall rise, and many moons shall wane,
And old men die, and young men pass their prime,
And languid Pleasure fade and flower again ;
And the dull Gods behold, ere these are flown,
Revels more deep, joy keener than their own.

" Into the silence of the groves and woods
I will go forth ; but something would I say—
Something—yet what I know not : for the Gods
The doom they pass revoke not, nor delay ;
And prayers, and gifts, and tears, are fruitless all,
And the night waxes, and the shadows fall.

"Ye men of Egypt, ye have heard your king.
I go, and I return not. But the will
Of the great Gods is plain ; and ye must bring
Ill deeds, ill passions, zealous to fulfil
Their pleasure, to their feet ; and reap their praise,
The praise of Gods, rich boon ! and length of days."

—So spake he, half in anger, half in scorn ;
And one loud cry of grief and of amaze
Broke from his sorrowing people : so he spake ;
And turning, left them there ; and with brief pause,
Girt with a throng of revellers, bent his way
To the cool region of the groves he loved.

There by the river banks he wander'd on,
From palm-grove on to palm-grove, happy trees,
Their smooth tops shining sunwards, and beneath
Burying their unsunn'd stems in grass and flowers :
Where in one dream the feverish time of Youth
Might fade in slumber, and the feet of Joy
Might wander all day long and never tire :
Here came the king, holding high feast, at morn
Rose-crown'd ; and ever, when the sun went down,
A hundred lamps beam'd in the tranquil gloom,
From tree to tree, all through the twinkling grove,
Revealing all the tumult of the feast,
Flush'd guests, and golden goblets, foam'd with wine ;
While the deep-burnish'd foliage overhead
Splinter'd the silver arrows of the moon.
It may be that sometimes his wondering soul
From the loud joyful laughter of his lips
Might shrink half startled, like a guilty man
Who wrestles with his dream ; as some pale Shape,
Gliding half hidden through the dusky stems,

Would thrust a hand before the lifted bowl,
Whispering, " A little space, and thou art mine."
It may be on that joyless feast his eye
Dwelt with mere outward seeming ; he, within,
Took measure of his soul, and knew its strength,
And by that silent knowledge, day by day,
Was calmed, ennobled, comforted, sustain'd.
It may be ; but not less his brow was smooth,
And his clear laugh fled ringing through the gloom,
And his mirth quail'd not at the mild reproof
Sigh'd out by Winter's sad tranquillity ;
Nor, pall'd with its own fulness, ebb'd and died
In the rich languor of long summer days ;
Nor wither'd, when the palm-tree plumes that roof'd
With their mild dark his grassy banquet-hall,
Bent to the cold winds of the showerless Spring ;
No, nor grew dark when Autumn brought the clouds.
So six long years he revell'd, night and day ;
And when the mirth wax'd loudest, with dull sound
Sometimes from the grove's centre echoes came,
To tell his wondering people of their king ;
In the still night, across the streaming flats,
Mix'd with the murmur of the moving Nile.

On " The Forsaken Merman " no comment is necessary. But it may be recalled that Arnold the school-inspector advocated the teaching of good poetry even to the youngest children, in place of the doggerel from the " Popular Reciters " then in vogue. One wonders if it struck him that Arnold the poet had written a poem better suited than almost any other in the language to be put to this admirable use. Not that " The Forsaken Merman " appeals exclusively to children. Like " Goblin Market," it satisfies

both the child and the maturest critic. Therein lies its peculiar charm.

THE FORSAKEN MERMAN

Come, dear children, let us away ;
Down and away below.
Now my brothers call from the bay;
Now the great winds shorewards blow ;
Now the salt tides seawards flow ;
Now the wild white horses play,
Champ and chafe and toss in the spray.
Children dear, let us away.
This way, this way.

Call her once before you go.
Call once yet.
In a voice that she will know :
" Margaret ! Margaret ! "
Children's voices should be dear
(Call once more) to a mother's ear :
Children's voices, wild with pain—
Surely she will come again.
Call her once and come away.
This way, this way.
" Mother dear, we cannot stay."
The wild white horses foam and fret
Margaret ! Margaret !

Come, dear children, come away down.
Call no more.
One last look at the white-wall'd town,
And the little grey church on the windy shore.
Then come down.
She will not come though you call all day.
Come away, come away.

Children dear, was it yesterday
We heard the sweet bells over the bay ?
In the caverns where we lay,
Through the surf and through the swell
The far-off sound of a silver bell ?
Sand-strewn caverns, cool and deep,
Where the winds are all asleep ;
Where the spent lights quiver and gleam ;
Where the salt weed sways in the stream ;
Where the sea-beasts ranged all round
Feed in the ooze of their pasture-ground ;
Where the sea-snakes coil and twine,
Dry their mail and bask in the brine ;
Where great whales come sailing by,
Sail and sail, with unshut eye,
Round the world for ever and aye ?
When did music come this way ?
Children dear, was it yesterday ?

Children dear, was it yesterday
(Call yet once) that she went away ?
Once she sate with you and me,
On a red gold throne in the heart of the sea,
And the youngest sate on her knee.
She comb'd its bright hair, and she tended it well,
When down swung the sound of the far-off bell.
She sigh'd, she look'd up through the clear green sea.
She said : " I must go, for my kinsfolk pray
In the little grey church on the shore to-day.
'Twill be Easter-time in the world—ah me !
And I lose my poor soul, Merman, here with thee."
I said : " Go up, dear heart, through the waves.
Say thy prayer, and come back to the kind sea-caves."
She smiled, she went up through the surf in the bay.
Children dear, was it yesterday ?

Children dear, were we long alone ?
"The sea grows stormy, the little ones moan.
Long prayers," I said, " in the world they say.
Come," I said, and we rose through the surf in the bay.
We went up the beach, by the sandy down
Where the sea-stocks bloom, to the white-wall'd town.
Through the narrow paved streets, where all was still,
To the little grey church on the windy hill.
From the church came a murmur of folk at their prayers,
But we stood without in the cold blowing airs.
We climb'd on the graves, on the stones, worn with rains,
And we gazed up the aisle through the small leaded panes.
She sate by the pillar ; we saw her clear :
" Margaret, hist ! come quick, we are here.
Dear heart," I said, " we are long alone.
The sea grows stormy, the little ones moan."
But, ah, she gave me never a look,
For her eyes were seal'd to the holy book.
Loud prays the priest ; shut stands the door.
Come away, children, call no more.
Come away, come down, call no more.

Down, down, down.
Down to the depths of the sea.
She sits at her wheel in the humming town,
Singing most joyfully.
Hark, what she sings : " O joy, O joy,
For the humming street, and the child with its toy.
For the priest, and the bell, and the holy well.
For the wheel where I spun,
And the blessed light of the sun."

And so she sings her fill,
Singing most joyfully,
Till the shuttle falls from her hand,
And the whizzing wheel stands still.
She steals to the window, and looks at the sand ;
And over the sand at the sea ;
And her eyes are set in a stare ;
And anon there breaks a sigh,
And anon there drops a tear,
From a sorrow-clouded eye,
And a heart sorrow-laden,
A long, long sigh.
For the cold strange eyes of a little Mermaiden,
And the gleam of her golden hair.

Come away, away children.
Come children, come down.
The salt tide rolls seaward.
Lights shine in the town.
She will start from her slumber
When gusts shake the door ;
She will hear the winds howling,
Will hear the waves roar.
We shall see, while above us
The waves roar and whirl,
A ceiling of amber,
A pavement of pearl.
Singing, " Here came a mortal,
But faithless was she.
And alone dwell for ever
The kings of the sea."

But, children, at midnight,
When soft the winds blow ;
When clear falls the moonlight ;
When spring-tides are low :

When sweet airs come seaward
From heaths starr'd with broom ;
And high rocks throw mildly
On the blanch'd sands a gloom :
Up the still, glistening beaches,
Up the creeks we will hie ;
Over banks of bright seaweed
The ebb-tide leaves dry.
We will gaze, from the sand-hills,
At the white, sleeping town ;
At the church on the hill-side—
  And then come back down.
Singing, " There dwells a loved one,
But cruel is she.
She left lonely for ever
The kings of the sea."

It seems incredible that such siren-music should have fallen on deaf ears. A society properly apprehensive of beauty would have been all agog to know who was this clear-voiced singer masquerading behind the first letter of the alphabet. But interest in the matter was conspicuously absent, and " The Strayed Reveller " was withdrawn from circulation after the sale of a few copies.

A similar fate befell Arnold's second volume, which, still as " A.," he put forth in 1852 under the title of " Empedocles on Etna and Other Poems." Yet this book contains poetry as arresting as any in its forerunner. Indeed, in these two volumes are to be found practically all the best of the poet's work, with such notable exceptions as " Sohrab

and Rustum," "The Scholar Gipsy," and "Thyrsis."

"Empedocles on Etna," cast in a very undramatic form of drama, is really a long philosophical poem interspersed with lyrics. Its main feature is the monologue of the Sicilian physician and sage, beginning

> The out-spread world to span
> A cord the Gods first slung,
> And then the soul of man
> There, like a mirror hung,
> And bade the winds through space impel the gusty toy.

This monologue is interesting, though in parts a little prosaic. Its counsel of resignation and self-examination shows that Arnold, if not actually making use of Empedocles as the mouthpiece of his own thoughts, was drawn to the Sicilian by an affinity of philosophy. But the poem is memorable not so much for the ideas it contains as for the interjected songs of Callicles, the harp-player. Where all are so beautiful it is difficult to make a selection, but the idyll of Cadmus and Harmonia will illustrate their quality as well as another.

> Far, far from here,
> The Adriatic breaks in a warm bay
> Among the green Illyrian hills ; and there
> The sunshine in the happy glens is fair,
> And by the sea, and in the brakes.
> The grass is cool, the sea-side air
> Buoyant and fresh, the mountain flowers
> More virginal and sweet than ours.

And there, they say, two bright and aged snakes,
Who once were Cadmus and Harmonia,
Bask in the glens or on the warm sea-shore,
In breathless quiet, after all their ills.
Nor do they see their country, nor the place
Where the Sphinx liv'd among the frowning hills,
Nor the unhappy palace of their race,
Nor Thebes, nor the Ismenus, any more.

There those two live, far in the Illyrian brakes.
They had staid long enough to see,
In Thebes, the billow of calamity
Over their own dear children roll'd,
Curse upon curse, pang upon pang,
For years, they sitting helpless in their home,
A grey old man and woman : yet of old
The Gods had to their marriage come,
And at the banquet all the Muses sang.

Therefore they did not end their days
In sight of blood ; but were rapt, far away,
To where the west wind plays,
And murmurs of the Adriatic come
To those untrodden mountain lawns : and there
Placed safely in changed forms, the Pair
Wholly forget their first sad life, and home,
And all that Theban woe, and stray
For ever through the glens, placid and dumb.

This is exquisite indeed. But it was in the final song that Arnold uttered his unique cry of sheer and spontaneous lyric joy :

Through the black, rushing smoke-bursts,
Quick breaks the red flame
All Etna heaves fiercely
Her forest-clothed frame.

Not here, O Apollo !
Are haunts meet for thee.
But, where Helicon breaks down
In cliff to the sea.

Where the moon-silver'd inlets
Send far their light voice
Up the still vale of Thisbe,
O speed, and rejoice !

On the sward, at the cliff-top,
Lie strewn the white flocks ;
On the cliff-side, the pigeons
Roost deep in the rocks.

In the moonlight the shepherds,
Soft lull'd by the rills,
Lie wrapt in their blankets,
Asleep on the hills.

—What Forms are these coming
So white through the gloom ?
What garments out-glistening
The gold-flower'd broom ?

What sweet-breathing Presence
Out-perfumes the thyme ?
What voices enrapture
The night's balmy prime ?—

'Tis Apollo comes leading
His choir, the Nine.
—The Leader is fairest,
But all are divine.

They are lost in the hollows,
They stream up again.
What seeks on this mountain
The glorified train ?—

They bathe on this mountain,
In the spring by their road.
Then on to Olympus,
Their endless abode.

—Whose praise do they mention,
Of what is it told ?—
What will be for ever,
What was from of old.

First hymn they the Father
Of all things : and then
The rest of Immortals,
The action of men.

The Day in its hotness,
The strife with the palm ;
The Night in its silence,
The Stars in their calm.

With this fine poem were published nearly all Arnold's most striking sentimental and moral poems : that is to say, the bulk of the lyrics subsequently forming "Switzerland" and "Faded Leaves" ; and "The Buried Life," "Self-Dependence," "Morality," and a number of kindred pieces, several of which are only omitted here for lack of space. The "Memorial Verses" occasioned by the death of Arnold's master, Wordsworth, and the "Stanzas in

Memory of the Author of 'Obermann,'" foreshadow the author's later predilection for elegiac themes. But easily the greatest thing in the collection, the one poem altogether worthy to be set beside "The Strayed Reveller" and "The Forsaken Merman" of the earlier volume or the later "Sohrab and Rustum" and "The Scholar Gipsy," was "Tristram and Iseult."

There is an interesting passage in a letter of Arnold's written several years after the appearance of this poem. "The fault I find with Tennyson in his 'Idylls of the King,'" he wrote, "is that the peculiar charm and aroma of the Middle Age he does not give them. There is something magical about it, and I will do something with it before I have done." This promise he did not keep, nor can it be said that he put anything of the Middle Age into "Tristram and Iseult." Of the four great modern poets who have concerted so incomparable a postscript to our national epic cycle, Morris was the only one who in any measure reproduced the spirit of the original. Tennyson, indeed, got a suggestion of mediæval magic into "The Lady of Shalott" and the early "Morte d'Arthur"; but he had lost the secret before he wrote the "Idylls." Swinburne's "Tale of Balen" has the simplicity and vigour of an older age, but his "Tristram of Lyonesse" is as modern as Meredith's "Modern Love." Arnold's poem also, though very different, is perfectly modern.

The enormous differences between the two nineteenth-century versions of the deathless tale

of Tristram piques one to contrast and compare them. They are very typical of their authors, the one so exuberant, the other so restrained. And it must be confessed that here, in the long run, restraint wins. There are, of course, passionate lyrics of Swinburne's beside which the fires of "Switzerland" seem very pale and ineffectual. All Arnold's love-poems together would kick the beam if scaled against "The Triumph of Time." But with these longer, more objective poems it is different. Swinburne's "Tristram" is a glowing experience when Swinburne is a new enthusiasm. Afterwards the memory of it is a possession, but as an experience it is not to be repeated. One's ultimate judgment is that the poem is magnificent but unreadable.

With Arnold's "Tristram and Iseult" the case is very different. At the first reading—inevitably at a careless reading—it may seem a little too low in tone. But a second reading, far from being difficult, will call for a third, and that for another; and with every fresh reading the poem's exquisite modesty will yield new beauties.

The poem's being in the nature of a sketch adds to its charm. It is like an exquisite silverpoint. No attempt is made at a complete story of that heroic love. In the first part, "Tristram," the knight is already dying; in the second he dies; in the third he has been dead a year. It is very characteristic of Arnold that his real heroine is Iseult of Brittany, and not

Marc's wife ; also that he makes the marriage of Tristram and the younger Iseult fruitful instead of the unconsummated union of the story. Some of the most beautiful passages in the poem are, indeed, concerned with the children.

"Tristram" opens with a short dialogue between the dying knight, who is expecting Iseult of Ireland, and a page who is on the look-out for her coming ; the rest of the part being a monologue in which Tristram recapitulates the past, alternating with a commentary which, both in metre and in diction, recalls "Christabel." The second part, "Iseult of Ireland," is a dialogue, in a sonorous and beautiful measure, between the great lovers, ending with their death together and the reappearance of what one might call the chorus The third part, "Iseult of Brittany," is a lovely idyll, in decasyllabic couplets, of the widowed Iseult and her children.

Unfortunately, it is impossible to give the whole poem. But in view of Arnold's own habits of incorporation and dismemberment, it is permissible to make extracts. Nevertheless, it is perhaps best to select passages which are not essentially connected with the main theme. Each of the three parts ends with a picture which is in itself a perfect gem. The first of these, which follows on a beautiful description of the children asleep, has a touch of the ineffable wonder of Keats's "magic casements" :

Ah, tired madcaps, you lie still.
But were you at the window now
To look forth on the fairy sight
Of your illumin'd haunts by night ;
To see the park-glades where you play
Far lovelier than they are by day ;
To see the sparkle on the eaves,
And upon every giant bough
Of those old oaks, whose wet red leaves
Are jewell'd with bright drops of rain—
How would your voices run again !
And far beyond the sparkling trees
Of the castle park one sees
The bare heaths spreading, clear as day,
Moor behind moor, far, far away,
Into the heart of Brittany,
And here and there, lock'd by the land,
Long inlets of smooth glittering sea,
And many a stretch of watery sand
All shining in the white moon-beams.
But you see fairer in your dreams.

There is something of the same quality in the second " end-paper " :

The air of the December night
Steals coldly around the chamber bright,
Where those lifeless lovers be ;
Swinging with it, in the light
Flaps the ghostlike tapestry.
And on the arras wrought you see
A stately Huntsman, clad in green,
And round him a fresh forest-scene.
On that clear forest-knoll he stays,
With his pack round him, and delays.

He stares and stares, with troubled face,
At this huge, gleam-lit fireplace,
At that bright, iron-figured door,
And those blown rushes on the floor.
He gazes down into the room
With heated cheeks and flurried air,
And to himself he seems to say—
" What place is this, and who are they ?
Who is that kneeling Lady fair ?
And on his pillows that pale Knight
Who seems of marble on a tomb ?
How comes it here, this chamber bright,
Through whose mullion'd windows clear
The castle-court all wet with rain,
The drawbridge and the moat appear,
And then the beach, and, mark'd with spray,
The sunken reefs, and far away
The unquiet bright Atlantic plain ?
—What, has some glamour made me sleep,
And sent me with my dogs to sweep,
By night, with boisterous bugle-peal,
Through some old, sea-side, knightly hall,
Not in the free green wood at all ?
That Knight's asleep, and at her prayer
That lady by the bed doth kneel :
Then hush, thou boisterous bugle-peal ! "
The wild boar rustles in his lair—
The fierce hounds snuff the tainted air—
But lord and hounds keep rooted there.
Cheer, cheer thy dogs into the brake,
O Hunter ! and without a fear
Thy golden-tassell'd bugle blow,
And through the glades thy pastime take—
For thou wilt rouse no sleepers here !
For these thou seest are unmoved ;

Cold, cold as those who lived and loved
A thousand years ago.

Lastly, we have the story which Iseult of Brittany told her children and Tristram's:

What tale did Iseult to the children say,
Under the hollies, that bright winter's day?

She told them of the fairy-haunted land
Away the other side of Brittany,
Beyond the heaths, edged by the lonely sea;
Of the deep forest-glades of Broce-liande,
Through whose green boughs the golden sunshine creeps
Where Merlin by the enchanted thorn-tree sleeps.
For here he came with the fay Vivian,
One April, when the warm days first began;
He was on foot, and that false fay, his friend,
On her white palfrey: here he met his end,
In these lone sylvan glades, that April day.
This tale of Merlin and the lovely fay
Was the one Iseult chose, and she brought clear
Before the children's fancy him and her.

Blowing between the stems the forest air
Had loosen'd the brown curls of Vivian's hair,
Which play'd on her flush'd cheek, and her blue eyes
Sparkled with mocking glee and exercise.
Her palfrey's flanks were mired and bathed in sweat,
For they had travell'd far and not stopp'd yet.
A briar in that tangled wilderness
Had scored her white right hand, which she allows
To rest ungloved on her green riding-dress;
The other warded off the drooping boughs.
But still she chatted on, with her blue eyes
Fix'd full on Merlin's face, her stately prize:

Her 'haviour had the morning's fresh clear grace,
The spirit of the woods was in her face ;
She look'd so witching fair, that learned wight
Forgot his craft, and his best wits took flight,
And he grew fond, and eager to obey
His mistress, use her empire as she may.

They came to where the brushwood ceased, and day
Peer'd 'twixt the stems ; and the ground broke away
In a sloped sward down to a brawling brook,
And up as high as where they stood to look
On the brook's further side was clear ; but then
The underwood and trees began again.
This open glen was studded thick with thorns
Then white with blossom ; and you saw the horns,
Through the green fern, of the shy fallow-deer
Which come at noon down to the water here.
You saw the bright-eyed squirrels dart along
Under the thorns on the green sward ; and strong
The blackbird whistled from the dingles near,
And the light chipping of the woodpecker
Rang lonelily and sharp : the sky was fair,
And a fresh breath of spring stirr'd everywhere.
Merlin and Vivian stopp'd on the slope's brow
To gaze on the green sea of leaf and bough
Which glistering lay all round them, lone and mild,
As if to itself the quiet forest smiled.
Upon the brow-top grew a thorn ; and here
The grass was dry and moss'd, and you saw clear
Across the hollow : white anemones
Starr'd the cool turf, and clumps of primroses
Ran out from the dark underwood behind.
No fairer resting-place a man could find.
" Here let us halt," said Merlin then ; and she
Nodded, and tied her palfrey to a tree.

They sate them down together, and a sleep
Fell upon Merlin, more like death, so deep.
Her finger on her lips, then Vivian rose,
And from her brown-lock'd head the wimple throws,
And takes it in her hand, and waves it over
The blossom'd thorn-tree and her sleeping lover.
Nine times she waved the fluttering wimple round,
And made a little plot of magic ground.
And in that daisied circle, as men say,
Is Merlin prisoner till the judgment-day,
But she herself whither she will can rove,
For she was passing weary of his love.

It can hardly be wondered at that a public of fifty for such work as this damped Arnold's "genial courage," as William Cory aptly phrased it.

The discouragement, however, was happily transient. Like "The Strayed Reveller," "Empedocles on Etna" was withdrawn from circulation, but in the following year, 1853, Arnold published, under his own name, a volume containing most of the best of the earlier poems, together with a number of new ones.

The most important omission from this collection was "Empedocles on Etna" itself. This omission, error in judgment as we may think it, is not now to be regretted; for fourteen years later, and at the special request of Robert Browning, the poem was restored to the company of the work which Arnold meant for permanence; and, in the second place, to explain his reasons for leaving the poem to languish in limbo, the poet wrote a preface which is the

earliest and one of the most valuable expressions of his critical attitude.

"Empedocles on Etna," he says, belongs to that "class of situations" "from the representation of which, though accurate, no poetical enjoyment can be derived . . . those in which the suffering finds no vent in action; in which a continuous state of mental distress is prolonged, unrelieved by incident, hope, or resistance; in which there is everything to be endured, nothing to be done." Human actions are the proper theme of poetry, and the most excellent actions are those "which most powerfully appeal to the great primary human affections." Such actions are to be found mainly in ancient stories, and if the poet cannot reproduce their events accurately in detail, it does not matter, since his business is with essentials. This, though Arnold does not say so in so many words, is the justification of anachronism. The action is to be regarded as a whole and not in parts; that is to say, the poem is to follow the poet's full comprehension of his theme, and is not to be built from the separate mosaics of his fancy. "All depends upon the subject; choose a fitting action, penetrate yourself with the feelings of its situations; this done, everything else will follow." That is the message which the theory of Aristotle, the practice of the Greek poets, had for Arnold. Yet the Greeks, concerned with their subject rather than with phrase-making, were masters of the "grand style." As Arnold wrote in a later essay, "the superior

character of truth and seriousness, in the matter of the best poetry, is inseparable from the superiority of diction and movement marking its style and manner."

This preface is an eloquent defence of subject against subjectivity, a plea for authority to replace the anarchy which Arnold saw around him. The highest authorities, in his opinion, were the classical poets ; not even Shakespeare was so trustworthy, his mastery " of happy, abundant, and ingenious expression " making him a danger to the unwary. Milton, whom, curiously enough, Arnold does not mention here, was the only English poet who quite came up to his idea of what a poet should be.

The merits of the opinions stated in this essay cannot be discussed here. It is the perennial case of classicism against romanticism, authority against individualism, which will never be decided to every one's satisfaction. Arnold was a thorough-going classicist, but it is not impossible that his attitude was to some extent the result of reaction. Except in the case of Wordsworth, his valuation of poets later than Gray was lower than the general. Of his contemporaries he was singularly unappreciative. But if his letters only commenced ten years earlier we might find that he had been in greater subjection to the romantics, more especially to Byron, than he afterwards acknowledged. It is only a guess, but a certain aroma which clings to his own poetry prompts it. In any case, though his practice was often as good as his

preaching, he is not unscathed by his own criticism. Unity, as we have seen, is not the predominant characteristic of "Tristram and Iseult." The felicitous phrase provokes his frown; yet many a single line or couplet of his rears its head above its fellows: "France, famed in all great arts, in none supreme"; "Who saw life steadily and saw it whole"; "his sad lucidity of soul";

> Still nursing the unconquerable hope,
> Still clutching the inviolable shade;

and

> Eyes too expressive to be blue,
> Too lovely to be grey.

These are familiar to many who could not repeat a word of their contexts. "Arnold's jewel-work is bright," Mr. Andrew Lang once wrote; and though he wrote it in the envoy of a ballade, it is an accurate statement. Moreover, Arnold once quoted a single line of Chaucer as sufficient evidence of the poet's quality. Lastly, in matters of metre at all events, he was not altogether guiltless of that "caprice" which he calls the "eternal enemy."

"Sohrab and Rustum," however, the chief of the new poems in the volume of 1853, is an admirable example of what fine work can be done without transgressing classic laws. Based on the Persian story of a single combat in which a father, an Achillean warrior, slays his son unwittingly, it is a perfect epic in miniature. Here, certainly, is a unity which defies quota-

tion. But action and atmosphere are alike entirely adequate, and the pity of the story is most poignantly realised. The writing of this poem gave Arnold peculiar pleasure, as well it might.

Among the other fresh pieces were "The Scholar Gipsy"; "The Church of Brou," with the fine description of the tombs; Arnold's loveliest lyric, "Requiescat"; "Philomela," athrob with beauty; and "The Neckan," which shows the poet still attracted by the soulless people of the sea.

The "Poems" of 1853 were followed, at an interval of two years, by "Poems, second series," containing a further selection from the two anonymous volumes, together with "Balder Dead." Arnold's second long narrative in blank verse has not quite the same attraction as "Sohrab and Rustum." It is more remote from the sphere of our sorrow. Nevertheless it is, in its way, as fine an achievement. The chill grey atmosphere, the northern gloom and the sense of desolation accompanying the death of a god are rendered with mastery.

III

MEANWHILE two events, closely connected the one with the other, had taken place, both of which were of great importance in Arnold's life. Early in 1851—between the publication of his first and second volume—he received, at the hands of Lord Lansdowne, an

appointment as Inspector of Schools. Just two months later, June 10, he married Frances Lucy Wightman, the daughter of Mr. Justice Wightman: a typical middle-class marriage, he called it, a schoolmaster's son to a judge's daughter. He used to go on circuit as his father-in-law's marshal, taking an artistic pleasure in the judge's administration of the law.

Middle-class or not, Matthew Arnold's marriage was supremely happy. Himself the most lovable of men, he was devoted to "Flu" (as he always wrote of her) and to the children she bore him. The charm of his letters, disappointing from a more literary point of view, lies in their domestic idyllism. Clouds there were, no doubt, poignant sorrow for the untimely death of three of his sons, yet he never, one imagines, regretted the sacrifice his marriage cost him.

For at the time there was certainly an element of sacrifice about his acceptance of the inspectorship. Such work was not his choice. No doubt he had hoped that a secretaryship to the Lord President of the Council would lead to higher things. It is believed that he would have liked to enter the Diplomatic Service, for which, by his personality, his interest in foreign politics and literature, and his love of continental life, he was eminently suited. He always longed to live abroad, in France or Switzerland or, later, in Italy. "All this afternoon," he wrote to his wife when inspecting schools in Sudbury in 1853, "I have been haunted by a vision of living with you at Berne, in a diplomatic

appointment, and how different that would be from this incessant grind in schools ; but I could laugh at myself, too, for the way in which I went on drawing out our life in my mind." As a diplomatist he would probably have risen high. Later, in connection with his work, he was several times sent abroad on semi-diplomatic missions, which he conducted with conspicuous success ; leaving a permanent record thereof in "A French Eton," "Schools and Universities on the Continent," and other works.

But if Arnold wanted to live abroad, he wanted to live there with Frances Lucy Wightman. For a poor man the two desires were not both attainable. He had to choose between them, and he chose wisely.

None the less, at first he frankly detested his new work. As there were at that time only two other men in England who held similar appointments, his beat was wide, carrying him across the face of England from Pembroke Dock to Great Yarmouth. His existence, in fact, was not far removed from that of the bagman—a sort of prosaic and provincial *wanderjahre.* Sometimes his wife went with him : one of their children was born in lodgings at Derby. At other times he travelled alone and wrote Mrs. Arnold dryly humorous accounts of his adventures. One is struck by the frequency with which he was reduced to lunching on buns.

But as time went on he took more kindly to the work which was to occupy thirty-five years

of his life. He had a natural sympathy and understanding for children (which doubtless developed with his own fatherhood), and his courtesy and consideration gave him immense popularity with teachers of either sex. Nor was it possible that an Arnold, of all men, should come in contact with education and remain indifferent.[1]

So it came to pass that an occupation which had at first been naturally uncongenial to a poet became not only a source of interest to himself, but of profit to his country. Arnold developed into a wise and expert educationalist. Many of the reforms he advocated have since been carried out : compulsory education under local administration, for example ; though, with his usual logic, he wished the compulsion to be universal and not applied to one particular class. He wished the universities, which he found too much like mere sequels to the public schools, and the public schools, which he considered lost in their playgrounds, to be put under State control. The private schools he would have starved out of existence. With regard to actual curricula, he thought that the rudiments of science should be taught in the elementary schools ; though he very naturally gave most importance to literature. He was characteristically insistent on the literary value of the Bible, and he himself edited the last twenty-

[1] Of Matthew Arnold's brothers, Thomas was a professor in University College, Dublin; Edward Penrose an inspector of schools, and William Delafield director of public instruction in the Punjab.

seven chapters of "Isaiah" as "A Bible Reading for Schools," which, however, was never used for that purpose. He even recommended that the higher forms in the elementary schools should be taught Latin from the Vulgate. His reason, I suppose, might be given much in the words with which Mr. Hilaire Belloc explains the bilingual nature of a song in "The Path to Rome." "If you ask me why I put a Latin line at the end, it was because I had to show that it was a song connected with the Universal Fountain and with European culture, and with all that Heresy combats." From Mr. Belloc's point of view, of course, Arnold was himself a heretic; but for the particular brand of heresy known as nonconformity contact had given him an aversion which tended to become an obsession. And as for the universal fountain and European culture —culture, "to know ourselves and the world," was for Arnold the aim and object of education.

Such questions, of course, are of immense importance and interest, but unfortunately Matthew Arnold, as he became absorbed in them, wrote less and less poetry. After the publication of "Poems" in 1853 Lord John Russell had remarked that "in his opinion Matthew Arnold was the one rising young poet of the present day." This was perfectly true, except for the word "rising." Arnold had already reached his high-water mark. "Balder Dead" was yet to come, then "Merope," 'Thyrsis," and the "New Poems" of 1867,

and, many years afterwards, the magnificent "Westminster Abbey." But this, as the production of thirty-five years, was not much.

The truth is, of course, that his duties left him little leisure. "I think I shall be able to do something more in time," he wrote in April 1856, "but am sadly bothered and hindered at present, and that puts one in *deprimirter Stimmung*, which is a fatal thing." An obvious comment on this is that many of his poems were certainly written in *deprimirter Stimmung* and this suggests another reason for the gradual cooling of his Muse. His marriage and his new interests had taught him the value of happiness, and he was not of that exuberant nature which puts happiness into verse. When he was again "able to do something" he did it mainly in prose.

A year after the letter just quoted was written, however, Arnold's connection with poetry was made official. He was elected to the professorship of Poetry at Oxford, the first layman to occupy the chair since its inauguration half a century before. This appointment was the occasion of his most unfortunate poetic venture. In order to vindicate his championship of classicism, which had again been his theme in his inaugural lecture "The Modern Element in Literature," he composed and published "Merope," dreariest of blank-verse dramas in an age of dreary blank-verse dramas.

Perhaps he was overwhelmed by his professorship, though one would scarcely have

expected Matthew Arnold to be discountenanced by that. His mastery of blank verse had already been displayed in "Sohrab and Rustum" and "Balder Dead." The author of "The Strayed Reveller" ought at least to have been able to produce a creditable imitation of the Greek chorus. Moreover, he had once written an admirable "Fragment of an 'Antigone'." Yet "Merope" had not even the galvanised life which skilled hands occasionally put into such archaisms. Professor Dowden has well described it as "a death-mask, not without a certain dignity, taken from the face of Greek tragedy." Only one of the characters, Polyphontes the king, shows any semblance of life, and even his vitality is feeble and intermittent. Arnold's own belief in the play is almost pathetic. Probably he was the only person who sincerely thought it finer than "Atalanta in Calydon," which, seven years after the publication of "Merope," established its author's fame as a poet. Once more a comparison between Arnold and Swinburne suggests itself. This time the older poet can only be allowed the doubtful advantage of having followed with more slavish accuracy the mechanism of his models. In all other respects he is immeasurably inferior.

Arnold's Oxford professorship, to which he was re-elected in 1862 for a second period of five years, is chiefly memorable for two courses of lectures, that on translating Homer and that on the study of Celtic literature. The former, in which appear for the first time the most salient

characteristics of Arnold's prose, his tendency to banter and that trick of repetition which, when not overdone, gave his style so admirable a lucidity, was the occasion of a controversy with Francis Newman, the cardinal's brother, whose recent translation of Homer the lecturer criticised. These lectures are still good to read, though they have not, until lately, made many converts to their author's point of view. His contention that the test of a translation should be its appeal to Greek scholars with an appreciation of poetry was sound, but when he went on to affirm that the English hexameter was the metre in which Homer should be rendered, it must be admitted that the evidence supplied by former experiments in that measure was overwhelmingly against him. Nor did his own halting efforts, with which he illustrated his argument, do much to help his case. Quite recently, however, a translation of the "Odyssey" has been made in the original measure,[1] which has been hailed by scholars as the most satisfying rendering of the great poem. Thus, after many years, Arnold's wisdom, here as in other cases, has been vindicated against the criticism of prejudice.

Of Arnold's appearance and manner when delivering these lectures Mr. George Russell has etched a vignette, which I take the liberty to quote: "Few are those who can still recall the graceful figure in its silken gown, the gracious address, the slightly supercilious smile of the *Milton jeune et voyageant*, just

[1] By Mr. H. B. Cotterill.

returned from contact with all that was best in French culture to instruct and astonish his own University ; few who can still catch the cadence of the opening sentence : 'It has more than once been suggested to me that I should translate Homer' ; few that heard the fine tribute of the aged scholar who, as the young lecturer closed a later discourse, murmured to himself, 'The Angel ended.'" [1] This aged scholar was Dr. Williams, Principal of Jesus College, and it was George Sand who had called Arnold the *Milton jeune et voyageant.* During a recent visit to France he had met not only George Sand, but Prosper Merimée and Sainte-Beuve, his master in criticism, whose influence is clearly to be seen in "Essays in Criticism," which were published a few years later.

The lectures on the study of Celtic literature, cited as the second memorable event of Arnold's professorship, were the last he delivered before he vacated the chair. One remarkable thing about them is that they were delivered by a man who was entirely ignorant of any of the Celtic tongues ; another is the amount of imaginative insight which, in spite of this ignorance, the lecturer displayed. Bored with watching the Liverpool steamboats, during a holiday at Llandudno, Arnold had turned his monocle inland. The result of his desultory investigations of Welsh traditions was a course of lectures which are still fresh after forty years ; which, indeed, that learned Celtic student, Mr. Alfred

[1] Russell : "Matthew Arnold," p. 36.

Nutt, thought it worth while to re-edit shortly before his tragic death. "Only men of genius can do these things," as Mr. Herbert Paul says.

The year 1867, however, is more significant to us for the publication of "New Poems" than for the publication of "On the Study of Celtic Literature."

Besides "Empedocles on Etna," at last restored to accessibility by Browning's request, "New Poems" contained the harvest, meagre in bulk if not in quality, of a dozen years. "Thyrsis," the masterpiece of the collection, had appeared in 1865, "Rugby Chapel" was written in '57, "Haworth Churchyard" in '55, while "Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse" dates from the same year. The famous lines in the last—

> Wandering between two worlds, one dead,
> The other powerless to be born,
> With nowhere yet to rest my head

—were written in a mood which the poet was soon to show he had outlived. As a motto for the volume Arnold put the following quatrain:

> Though the Muse be gone away,
> Though she move not earth to-day,
> Souls, erewhile who caught her word,
> Ah! still harp on what they heard.

The lines were appropriate. Arnold's later poetry is largely retrospective. Always a reflective, often a didactic, poet, he uttered the purely lyrical note less and less frequently as time went

on. When he tries to write a love-poem, as in "Calais Sands," he is far more rhetorical than he ever was in "Switzerland"; or when he stands beside his love on Dover Beach he thinks of Sophocles and the Sea of Faith. Nevertheless, "Dover Beach" is a poem both fine in itself and interesting as indicating a phase of the poet's spiritual development.

DOVER BEACH

The sea is calm to-night.
The tide is full, the moon lies fair
Upon the straits;—on the French coast the light
Gleams and is gone; the cliffs of England stand,
Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay.
Come to the window, sweet is the night air!
Only, from the long line of spray
Where the sea meets the moon-blanch'd land,
Listen! you hear the grating roar
Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling,
At their return, up the high strand,
Begin, and cease, and then again begin,
With tremulous cadence slow, and bring
The eternal note of sadness in.

Sophocles long ago
Heard it on the Ægean, and it brought
Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow
Of human misery; we
Find also in the sound a thought,
Hearing it by this distant northern sea.

The Sea of Faith
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore

Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furl'd.
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Retreating, to the breath
Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world.

Ah, love, let us be true
To one another ! for the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain ;
And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.

"Bacchanalia, or the New Age," a poem of much beauty, shows the poet as happier to contemplate the past than to share in the busy present. "Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse" draws a poignant comparison between the calm life of the monks and the doubt-wracked outer world. Notable among other poems in the volume are the elegies: "Rugby Chapel," the fine lines on Dr. Arnold already quoted from ; "Heine's Grave," with its picture of England as the "weary Titan" ; "Haworth Churchyard," in memory of the Brontë sisters ; and, of course, "Thyrsis."

There is no denying the fact that a certain element of prose has crept into these "New Poems." Arnold's earlier work, conformable as it was to his own questionable definition of

poetry, was (with the exception of a few sonnets) at least critical only of the permanent essentials of life. No poetry could be of more general application than "Morality" or "Self-Dependence." But, as time went on, the imperfections of his own age took up more and more of his attention. The "Grande Chartreuse," "Rugby Chapel," "Heine's Grave"—these and others betray his preoccupations. He narrowed his scope and became the less a poet. The year 1867 might be taken as the date at which Arnold the poet and critic of essentials became Arnold the prose-writer and critic of his time. The division, of course, is rough. His pamphlet on the Italian question, on the one hand, and "Westminster Abbey" on the other, are sadly out of place. Moreover, a certain amount that is ephemeral and opinionative may be found in the early poems, and much more that is eternal truth in the later prose.

With this prose we are not directly concerned. Arnold the poet is our theme. But since Arnold the man is also relevant, and since his prose was the chief work of the last twenty years of his life, it cannot be altogether ignored. Besides, the two forms of literature in his case, as in the case of all others who have employed both, lend themselves to comparison and mutual illumination. The obvious contrast between them—the melancholy of the poetry and the cheerfulness of the prose—is due to precisely the same causes as made him desert one for the other. He had learned the value of happiness. He had found

his proper attitude towards life. When he returned to verse, he was remembering his youth, or paying tribute to a friend, a master or, ultimately, a pet.

Of the respective values of Arnold's prose and verse there can be no question. There are people who think that the former, with the exception of "Essays in Criticism," is already dead, while to me "Culture and Anarchy," at any rate, seems as alive and as pertinent as it ever was.[1] But there is a point of poetic achievement which, being reached, relegates the finest prose work to a secondary place: perhaps even Meredith will eventually be remembered as the author of "Modern Love." To that point Matthew Arnold attained time and again.

During his professorship, the duties attached to which were not burdensome, Arnold had, of course, continued his work as inspector of schools. But education and literature did not take the whole of his attention. The significance of both, in fact, was for him as means to an end. And that end he called culture.

"Essays in Criticism," the publication of which in 1865 was a landmark in the history of English criticism, was a sequel, with just the amount of development to be expected after twelve years, to the preface of 1853, and it was

[1] Surely it is no mere flight of fancy to see the influence of "Culture and Anarchy" in one of the most modern of recent novels, Mr. H. G. Wells's "New Machiavelli." Richard Remington's ultimate opinions bear a strong resemblance to Arnold's, and his favourite phrase, "love and fine thinking," is at least reminiscent of "sweetness and light."

also a preliminary to "Culture and Anarchy." In the essay on Heine, the Philistine first makes his appearance; in that on the "Literary Influence of Academies" authority in literature is upheld and anarchy condemned; in that on the function of criticism it is pointed out that the time was essentially critical but that it was possible deliberately to prepare for an age of creation. In the preface, which contains the beautiful tribute to Oxford already quoted, the essence of Arnold's philosophy, as he expounded it a few years later, is given in a few eloquent lines: "To try and approach truth on one side after another, not to strive or cry, nor to persist in pressing forward, on any one side, with violence and self-will—it is only thus, it seems to me, that mortals may hope to gain any vision of the mysterious Goddess, whom we shall never see except in outline, but only thus even in outline."

This agnostic idealism, tempered by the optimism which defined God as a "stream of tendency, not ourselves, which makes for righteousness," seemed to Arnold to be as near as one could get to a definite creed. Naturally, therefore, he thought that much was wrong with an age which, taking its moral values as fixed, devoted its attention to getting material things done. Hence his plea for criticism, "a disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known in the world." "Sweetness and light," a phrase borrowed from Swift, were the qualities which culture would stimulate. England was too Hebrew; it must become

more Greek. The spirit of free inquiry must be given full play. Such was the nature of a book which, in spite of some faults of prejudice, deserves to be considered the Bible of true Liberalism.

"Culture and Anarchy" was followed by "Friendship's Garland," an exquisite satire written in the person of Arminius von Thunder-ten-Tronckh, whose name was borrowed from Voltaire's "Candide." Before these papers had appeared in book form, however, Arnold had turned his attention from politics to theology. "Saint Paul and Protestantism" was published in 1870, to be followed at intervals by "Literature and Dogma," "God and the Bible," and "Last Essays on Church and Religion."

"To disengage the religion of England from unscriptural Protestantism, political dissent, and a spirit of watchful jealousy," was Arnold's comparatively innocent intention in "St. Paul and Protestantism." But he soon went further than that, offering for the anthropomorphic deity of the orthodox a "stream of tendency," and for Christian dogma "morality touched with emotion."

These matters are altogether outside our scope, except in so far as they are illustrated in the poems. Arnold's fundamentally religious nature is evident in almost every line of verse he wrote. His reverence for the spirit of Christianity was profound, and in his hatred of nonconformity, or mere negation, he even upheld the Establishment. There was nothing

he detested more than unethical materialism; and he would probably have preferred that Darwin had never been born than that that should have been the result of his discoveries. This is clearly expressed in the vehement little poem "Pis-aller." If a man cannot find the kingdom of God within him, it is better that he should find it without than not at all.

PIS-ALLER

"Man is blind because of sin,
Revelation makes him sure;
Without that, who looks within,
Looks in vain, for all's obscure."

Nay, look closer into man!
Tell me, can you find indeed
Nothing sure, no moral plan
Clear prescribed, without your creed?

"No, I nothing can perceive!
Without that, all's dark for men.
That, or nothing, I believe."—
For God's sake, believe it then!

But Arnold himself was a living proof that a man can be *good*, in the highest sense that the word can possibly be given, without the help of dogma. Heterodox he certainly was; that he was irreligious, even from a Christian standpoint, is eternally gainsaid by that fine series of later sonnets, "The Better Part," "The Divinity," "Immortality," "The Good Shepherd with the Kid," and "Monica's Last Prayer."

The facts of Arnold's latter years may be stated in a very few words. His was at no time an eventful life. The routine work of an inspector of schools does not afford material for thrilling biography. In Arnold's case, it is true, the routine was several times broken in a pleasant fashion. In January 1859 he was sent abroad as Foreign Assistant Commissioner on Education to visit France, Holland, Belgium, Switzerland, and Piedmont. He liked his errand immensely, especially the French part of it, and obtained materials not only for his official report but also for his "French Eton," an account of the Lyceum at Toulouse. Subsequent missions of a similar nature took him to France again, to Germany, Switzerland, and Italy. Over him, as over so many English poets, Italy cast her spell.

Arnold's work for education, whether in collecting data abroad or suggesting improvements at home, is of acknowledged value. We have seen how his original distaste for it was gradually transmuted into keen interest. It was not his fault, however, that his inspectorship was not curtailed to less than half its actual length. In 1867 he applied for the post of librarian to the House of Commons, but, in spite of Disraeli's support, he was unsuccessful.

His applications for Government appointments were not, indeed, crowned with success. In 1866 he had tried for a commissionership of charities, but had been told that the post was for a lawyer. When he applied for a similar

position in 1882 he was once more refused. On this occasion, if not on the former, it was Gladstone who stood in the way. Between Arnold and the great statesman there was little mutual admiration. Gladstone, of course, detested Arnold's theology, while Arnold had not the highest opinion of Gladstone's political ability. In 1883, however, the one offered and the other, after some hesitation, accepted a Civil List pension of £250 "as a public recognition of service to the poetry and literature of England."

As far as poetry was concerned Matthew Arnold, as has been said, had long been doing his country but scanty service. There are only four pieces grouped under the heading "Later Poems" in his complete works. And of these only one really matters. The verses about his dogs and his canary, excellent for domestic circulation and pleasantly indicative of happy home-life, scarcely seem planned for immortality, though "Poor Matthias" has such neat lines as

> Cruel, but composed and bland,
> Dumb, inscrutable and grand,
> So Tiberius might have sat,
> Had Tiberius been a cat.

Still they do not proclaim their author the peer of Catullus, the supreme pet-elegist.

But "Westminster Abbey," written on the death of Arnold's old friend Dean Stanley, is another matter. In spite of the characteristic

touch of criticism in the antepenultimate stanza, which makes a slight discord in what were otherwise perfect harmony, it is indeed a "solemn music," not in any way made ashamed by the invariable, if not inevitable, comparison with Milton's "Nativity Ode." "Westminster Abbey" is one of the very finest flowers of Arnold's genius, which, after a sleep of fifteen years, woke at the summons of a worthy theme to this final and splendid manifestation of its power.

A year before the offer of the pension Arnold had already talked of retiring. "I have no wish to execute the Dance of Death in an elementary school," he wrote. But it was not until April 1886 that he actually sent in his resignation, after a final errand of inquiry on the Continent and a lecturing tour in America on his own account. Two years later, April 15, 1888, he died. He had gone to Liverpool with his wife to meet their elder daughter, who was returning from America. Running to catch a tramcar he overtaxed a weak heart and died instantly. He was buried where he was born, at Laleham.

IV

OF all the great Victorian writers Matthew Arnold is, perhaps, the one whom it would have been most satisfactory to know personally. There would, at any rate, have been no disillusion in such knowledge. The testimony to his rare charm is unanimous.

There was nothing about him that suggested the poet's traditional pose ; no unshorn locks or air of mystery. Like Browning, he was a man of the world : gay, courteous, social, a raconteur, a judge of wine, a lover of field-sports. His strange failure to appreciate the work of his contemporaries was certainly not due to jealousy, for in his personal relations he was always kindly and generous. Naturally prone to sarcasm, he was never bitter. Any sharpness of tongue was more than nullified by the sweetness of his smile. The ideal terms on which he lived with his family, his signal domestic happiness, the duration of his friendships, all testify to his goodness and his lovability. Lord Salisbury, who as Chancellor of Oxford conferred an honorary degree on Arnold, said afterwards, referring to the famous phrase in " Culture and Anarchy," that he ought to have addressed him as *vir dulcissime et lucidissime*. No form of address could have been more appropriate.

It would be quite futile to try to assign Arnold an exact position in the ranks of English poets, or even among his contemporaries. Within certain limits such valuations are purely matters of taste. But it may be affirmed, without much fear of contradiction, that he stands among the first three or four of the Victorians. In one respect or another he was doubtless surpassed by each of those whom this generic description calls most forcibly to mind. For sheer creative power Browning was enormously his superior. Tennyson excelled him in delicate craftsman-

ship of words and subtle coloration, Swinburne in splendour and fervour. But Arnold's poetry has a certain quality, as of clear water welling from a deep spring, which is his alone. Not for nothing was he a devout classicist. It gives him the claim to be named, in certain aspects, in the same breath with Milton and no other of his countrymen.

Thus, if he is inferior in one direction, he is superior in another. And it is very much a matter of taste which one considers the best direction to follow. For poetry, though it can be many other things, must always be a personal expression. The great thing is that the expression should be adequate and the personality admirable. Arnold's personality, as an attempt has been made to show in the foregoing pages, was of the highest. Few men probably have better deserved to be described as noble. To say that he had limitations is to say that he was a man. To say that he could not write passionate love poetry is to say that he was Arnold, not Swinburne ; though to be rhetorical, as he sometimes was, is always a fault in poetry. An artist is to be blamed, not for having limitations, but for not knowing them. But that Arnold was capable of passion of another kind is undisputably proven by such poems as "Pisaller" and "Dover Beach." He had a passion for the "good life."

This leads to another question : whether Arnold the moralist spoilt Arnold the poet. The contention that art and morality cannot keep

company is stultified by a good deal of the finest poetry ever written. If a poet chooses to put moral sentiments into his verse, who are the little critics to say him nay? The price he pays is that he challenges two judgments instead of one. Is the moral in verse good morality? Is the moral poem good art? Of Arnold's morality, as expressed in verse, something has been said. As to the artistic value of his moral poems, while there are undoubtedly a few of them which would have been better as essays, one has only to refer to "Morality," to "Self-Dependence," or to certain sonnets, for evidence that the poet's ethics did not necessarily spoil his art.

Nevertheless, Arnold's most beautiful work is to be found in his more purely artistic creations —poems wherein, though ideas are never lacking, he is not primarily didactic. Such poems are "The Strayed Reveller," "The Scholar Gipsy," "Thyrsis," "The Forsaken Merman," "Westminster Abbey"; such are the songs in "Empedocles"; and such is that exquisite lyric "Requiescat," where gravity of thought and lightness of hand are brought into so perfect a unison.

REQUIESCAT

Strew on her roses, roses,
And never a spray of yew.
In quiet she reposes:
Ah! would that I did too.

Her mirth the world required:
She bathed it in smiles of glee

But her heart was tired, tired,
And now they let her be.

Her life was turning, turning,
In mazes of heat and sound.
But for peace her soul was yearning,
And now peace laps her round.

Her cabin'd, ample Spirit,
It flutter'd and fail'd for breath.
To-night it doth inherit
The vasty Hall of Death.

After that, it is almost superfluous to insist on the technical excellence, the adequacy of expression, of most of the poet's work. "The Scholar Gipsy," "The Forsaken Merman," "Westminster Abbey" may again be called in, if necessary; and "Sohrab and Rustum" for the beauty and dignity of his blank verse; and a dozen sonnets for his skill as a sonneteer. One practice of his has, however, been much criticised: the practice of writing poems in lines without either rhyme or metre. It is true that this sort of poetry is only justified by success, and that Arnold was not always successful. His ear for rhythm was sometimes flagrantly at fault. Even in "The Strayed Reveller," with all its beauty, there are passages which are only poetry by virtue of width of margin. In some of the elegies, "Haworth Churchyard" and "Heine's Grave," he falls into a kind of rhymeless sing-song, with occasional irregularities, which has an ugly but not inappropriate effect of spontaneous rhapsody, careless of art.

Sometimes, however, he was completely successful in his unorthodoxy. Then the effect is only less beautiful than that of the finest metres. "Philomela" is, perhaps, the most perfect example of this.

PHILOMELA

Hark! ah, the Nightingale!
The tawny-throated!
Hark! from that moonlit cedar what a burst!
What triumph! hark—what pain!

O Wanderer from a Grecian shore,
Still, after many years, in distant lands,
Still nourishing in thy bewilder'd brain
That wild, unquench'd, deep-sunken, old-world pain—
  Say, will it never heal?
And can this fragrant lawn
With its cool trees, and night,
And the sweet, tranquil Thames,
And moonshine, and the dew,
To thy rack'd heart and brain
  Afford no balm?

  Dost thou to-night behold
Here, through the moonlight on this English grass,
The unfriendly palace in the Thracian wild?
  Dost thou again peruse
With hot cheeks and sear'd eyes
The too clear web, and thy dumb Sister's shame?
  Dost thou once more assay
Thy flight, and feel come over thee,
Poor Fugitive, the feathery change
Once more, and once more seem to make resound
With love and hate, triumph and agony,
Lone Daulis, and the high Cephissian vale?

Listen, Eugenia—
How thick the bursts come crowding through the leaves!
Again—thou hearest!
Eternal Passion
Eternal Pain!

There could hardly be a fitter moment for taking our leave of Matthew Arnold than by the Thames he loved, with the voice of the nightingale in his ears and ours.

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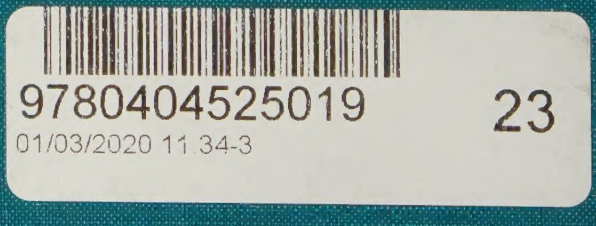
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